Having travelled in Kerala in the South West of India, Christine Chaillot has interviewed dignitaries, clergy and people from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India. This book is a presentation of this ancient Church which is said to have been founded by the Apostle Saint Thomas and which is one of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, together with the Syrian, Coptic, Armenian and Ethiopian Churches.

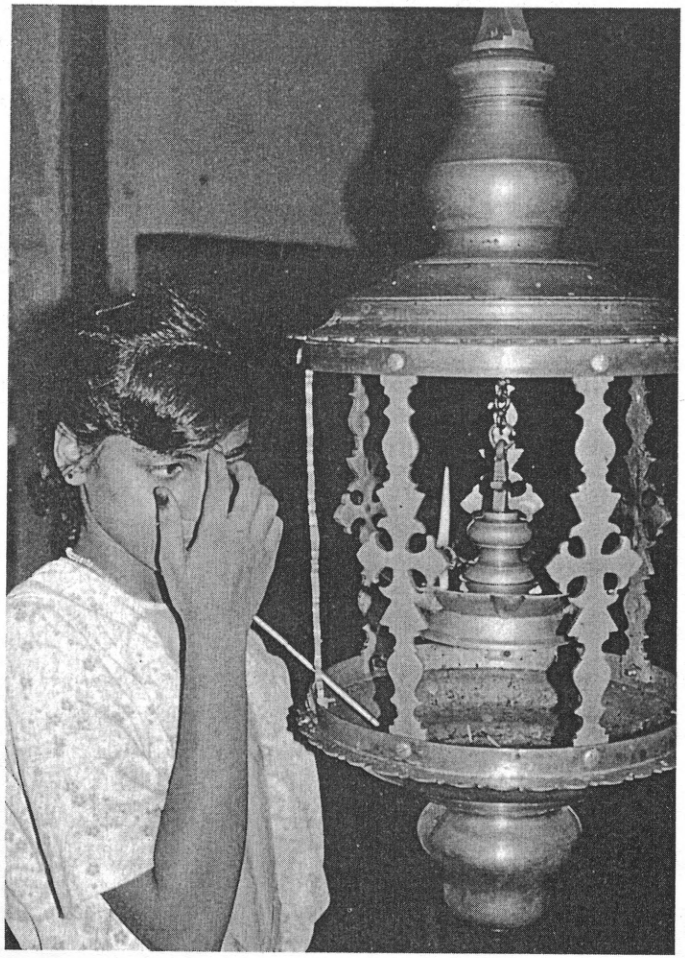
CHRISTINE CHAILLOT

The Malankara Orthodox Church

VISIT TO THE ORIENTAL MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH OF INDIA

INTER-ORTHODOX DIALOGUE

GENEVA 1996



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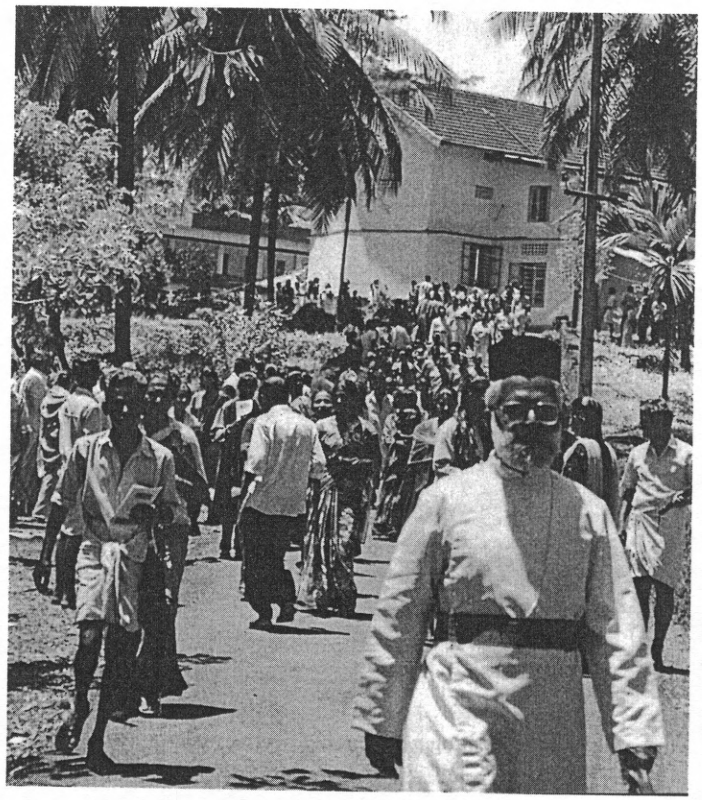

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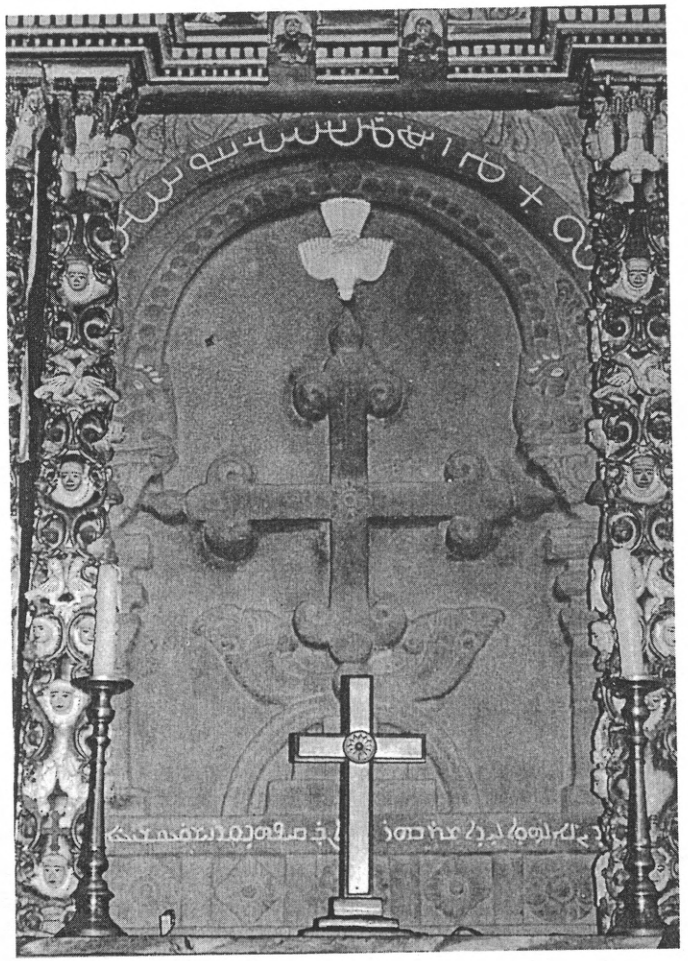

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- **Front cover page** : Blessing by Father Yohanna in the church of Pampadi
  inside front cover page : Young girl crossing herself with oil from a lamp
- **Back cover page** : Procession to celebrate the consecration of two *rambans* in Puthuppady near Calicut
  inside back cover page : Priest and his wife in white clothes

This book is dedicated to the Orthodox Christians of Asia

Jesus said to Thomas: "Reach your finger here; look at my hands. Reach your hand here and put it into my side. Be unbelieving no longer, but believe". Thomas said: " My Lord and my God!". Jesus said to him: "Because you have seen me you have found faith. Happy are they who find faith without seeing me". There were indeed many other signs that Jesus performed in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. Those written here have been recorded in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this faith you may have life by His Name". (John 20: 27-31)

MAPS OF INDIA AND KERALA

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Preface

Christine Chaillot's pilgrimage to the ancient Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India bears fruit in this interesting book. She has put together impressions and views about the Indian Orthodox Church which traces its origin to the Apostle Thomas. This book is a combination of personal interviews, reflexions and vision of a committed Orthodox woman who closely follows the ecumenical developments between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox families of Churches.

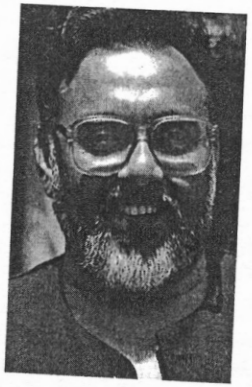
The Indian Orthodox Church, a member of the Oriental Orthodox family including the Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian and Indian churches, has been actively involved in the unofficial and, later, in the official dialogue between the two Orthodox families of Churches. The official dialogue which started in 1985 is built on the firm foundation of 25 years of unofficial theological conversations. The four unofficial dialogue meetings were jointly pioneered by Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios (Paul Verghese) of India and the late Professor Nikos Nissiotis of Greece. The initiative was supported by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and inspired by the Pan Orthodox Conference in Rhodes in 1962.

The theological contributions, from the Oriental Orthodox side, of two Indian theologians - Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios and Rev. Dr. V.C. Samuel- were decisive in taking this dialogue forward.

Overcoming the alienation and misunderstanding of 1500 years since the christological disputes around the Council of Chalcedon (451), both Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox sides could joyfully affirm that: " We recognize in each other the one Orthodox faith of the Church... On the essence of the christological dogma we found ourselves in full agreement. Through different terminologies used by each side, we saw the same truth expressed". The official dialogue followed the same line. Now the two families of churches are much closer to the moment of restoring eucharistic communion.

There are some practical issues yet to be tackled at the canonical, pastoral and pedagogical levels. These include the recognition of the number of ecumenical councils and the lifting of the mutually imposed anathema on venerable Fathers and teachers of both sides. There are proposals for a just and amicable settlement of such issues. The official Joint Commission, chaired by Metropolitan Damaskinos of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and by Metropolitan Bishoy of the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria, and its pastoral subcommission are working on these questions. We fervently hope that the Holy Spirit will lead our churches in the near future to the blessed moment of eucharistic communion in the unity of one Orthodox faith.

Christine Chaillot has a deep desire to be a witness to this coming together of our churches. Her observations about the life and tradition of the Indian Orthodox Church are geared to this end. The Indian cultural and ecclesiastical history is sometimes too complex for outsiders. Christine Chaillot, without making any pretension of academic approach, probes into the direct life and spirit of the Indian Orthodox church of today. The observations she made during her one month stay in India are, as she herself admits, just an introduction to this vast subject, with the purpose of stimulating the interest of all those who are concerned about Orthodox unity. The sincerity of her purpose and the perseverance of her spirit are admirable. She has done commendable work in introducing this rather small but highly vibrant Apostolic Orthodox Church of India to wider circles. I wish well in her efforts to bring our churches closer in the unity and love of Christ Our Lord.



Father K.M. George Kondothra

Vice-principal of the Theological Seminary of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India

The Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam

July 3rd 1996, Feast of Saint Thomas the Apostle of India

Introduction

Acccording to the tradition, India was evangelized by Saint Thomas, also called Didymus, one of the twelve Apostles of Christ. When the disciples told him that they had seen the Lord after the crucifixion, he refused to believe that Christ had risen and he said: "Unless I see the mark of the nails on his hands, unless I put my finger into the place where the nails were, and my hand into his side, I will never believe it". However, when Christ stood in the middle of his disciples eight days later, he said to Thomas: "Reach your finger here; look at my hands. Reach your hand here and put it into my side. Be unbelieving no longer, but believe". And Thomas suddenly enlightened answered with a profession of faith: " My Lord and my God!". And Jesus said to him: "Because you have seen me you have found faith. Happy are they who find faith without seeing me" (John 20: 24-29).

As Saint Thomas is believed to have evangelized southern India, the ancient Christian communities claim to be the descendants of the converts of the Apostle and are called the Saint Thomas Christians. Malankara is the old geographical name for present day Kerala in the south west of India.

A traveller of the 6th century, Cosma, wrote that in the land where pepper grows, that is India, there are Christian communities having a bishop appointed from Persia and celebrating in the Syriac language. These Indian Christians were part of the East Syrian Church, usually called the Church of the East, which is the Apostolic Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and which was preached to, according to tradition, either by Saint Thomas himself or by Addai, Mari and Haggai in Persia, on the east side of the Euphrates river, and this is the reason why it is called East Syrian. It should not be confused with the West Syrian Maphrianate of the East, in Persia, which was related to the West Syrian Patriarchate of Antioch. The expansion of this Church of the East was considerable from the 7th to the 14th century when missionary monks were sent all the way to Mongolia, China and the Far East. After the Council of Ephesus (431) and the controversy about the Virgin Mary being called the "Mother of God", this church became autocephalous. It does not like to be called "Nestorian" and prefers the name of "Church of the East". Let us note that in India this church is called "Chaldean", whereas elsewhere "Chaldean" is the denomination of the East Syrians who united to the Church of Rome. This venerable ancient church is still in existence not only in India, but also in its original places, in present day Irak, Syria, as well as in the diaspora around the world, mostly in the USA.

The Christian community of the Syriac rite in Malabar was an undivided body until the arrival of the Catholics in the 15th century. As for the Syrian Oriental Orthodox Christians of Antioch, they were asked by Indians to come and assist them and they arrived in India in 1665. From then on numerous denominations emerged.

The East Syrians who are united with Rome are called the Syro-Malabar and form today the largest Christian community in Kerala (3 million). Some Oriental Orthodox West Syrians under Bishop Ivanios joined the Catholic Church in 1930 and are known as Syro-Malankar (about 300,000). The other Catholics follow the Latin rite (15 million in India). Roman Catholics are a little more than half of the Christians in India.

Diverse Protestant churches settled in India from the 18th century on, but they were specially active in the 19th century. The Mar Thoma Church (about 800,000 members) came into being through some Orthodox Syrians adopting the Anglican reforms of 1843 but retaining adapted West Syrian prayers. The Protestant Church of South India counts about 2 million members. There are other Protestant or independant churches, such as the Thozhiur Church, which is a small independant church following the West Syrian tradition.

Some of these churches still strictly follow the Syriac liturgical tradition. Syriac is a semitic language close to Aramaic, the language

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spoken by Christ. The east Syriac language and the west Syriac language are two sister liturgical languages using a quite similar script but with different pronunciations according to the usage in the east or in the west of the river Euphrates in Persia. In Kerala today, some prayers may be said in Syriac, but most of the time the prayers are said in Malayalam which is the vernacular language of Kerala.

In a previous book, *"Rôle des Images et Vénération des Icônes dans les Eglises Orthodoxes Orientales"* (Geneva 1993), I tried to make these ancient Christian Oriental Orthodox communities known through their iconography. The Oriental Orthodox Churches are the Coptic, the Syrian, the Armenian, the Ethiopian, and the Indian Churches. Here I shall try to introduce the reader to the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India which is the official name of this church. My main purpose, once again, is to encourage Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox believers to know each other better and to prepare themselves for future unity, as recommended on several occasions by the Commission of the Official Theological Dialogue which began in 1985, with meetings in the Coptic Monastery of Amba Bishoy in Egypt in June 1989 and in the Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in Chambesy, Geneva, in September 1990 and November 1993 (see *Episkepsis* no 348, 422, 446, 498, 521 and the texts published by Syndesmos in *Towards Unity, The Dialogue of the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches*, 1996). Since 1990, the Commission composed of delegates sent by both the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox local churches has recognized that these families of churches have maintained an uninterruped continuity of the Apostolic tradition as well as the same christological faith, even though the Greek word *physis* was understood differently. For the Chalcedonians it meant "nature" and for Cyril of Alexandria and the Oriental Orthodox it also meant "person". So when Saint Cyril used his famous formula: "One *physis* of God the Word Incarnate", he meant one Person really divine (God the Word) and really human (Incarnate). Such a formula does not deny the humanity of Christ if it is well understood, but it emphasises the unity of the divine and the human in Christ. The Oriental Orthodox Churches accept the four expressions used in Chalcedon to describe the mystery of the one Person of Christ, being fully God and fully Man, " without confusion" (in Greek *asynchytôs*), "without changement" (*atreptôs*), "without

separation" (*achôristôs*), "without division" (*adiairetôs*). The Oriental Orthodox also accept the Orthodox faith of the Seven Ecumenical Councils (see the documents of the official Dialogue). The two families of churches have now recognized that what divided them was mostly due to a terminological misunderstanding, but that there is now agreement in the theological christological dogma. The final decision for full sacramental unity has to come from all the churches themselves, after the lifting of the anathemas.

The Oriental Orthodox Church of West Syrian rite in India, around 2 million members, is composed today of two bodies having the same faith and liturgical prayers, but with separate heads and administration, one being under the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, whose seat is now in Damascus in Syria, the other one having its autocephalous Catholicos in Kottayam, Kerala, in India. Let us note that a reconciliation committee met in April 1996 in Kerala.

In this little book, I shall concentrate on the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India, that is the autocephalous one.

In the following chapters, I now wish to share my experience with people of the Indian Orthodox Church during a trip I made in Kerala, India, in September 1994. Kerala is a beautiful green country in the south west of India. It is a country of coconut trees and rice fields between the sea in the west and mountains in the east. A local industry processes coconut fibres for ropes and mats. On backwater canals, boat races are organized during festivals, specially after the end of the monsoon in September during the *Onam* festival.

As concerns education, Kerala is the most literate state in India: 80% of the population can read and write, whereas the percentage for the rest of India is 40%. The health system too is of a high standard. Economically, the Syrian Orthodox in India are in the forefront in business, industry, education, and medical institutions. So their social role in the Indian society is important at all levels and their political involvement is not negligible: for instance the former cabinet minister C.M. Stephen and Dr P.C. Alexander who was the personal adviser of Indira and Radji Gandhi and is now the governor of Bombay. During the recent decades, Malayali people have emigrated in order to help financally those who remain in India. Today the main Christian centers are Kottayam, Cochin, Trivandrum and Ernakulam. Kerala is the Indian state in which there is the highest percentage of

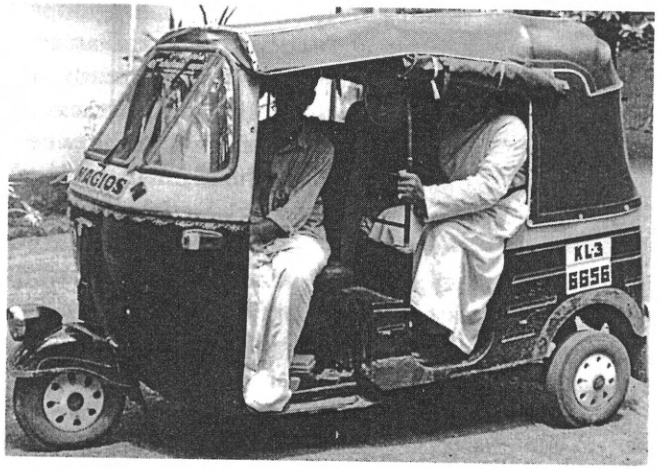
Christians (20 %). Christians in India are approximately 3,5% of the whole population of about 900 million people.

There are other great religions in Kerala, the main ones being Hinduism and Islam. Hinduism is the major traditional religion (80%) of India, which used to be a four caste system, the highest caste being that of the Brahmins who are the teachers of the Hindu religious tradition. Hinduism contains a broad range of beliefs and practices ranging from polytheism to very high philosophical speculations. There are also Buddhists, Jains, and followers of other religions. The Christians are a minority and the Oriental Orthodox Christians are a minority in the minority (about 2 million). The Indian Oriental Orthodox have good relationships with all other religious communities.

As these Indian Orthodox Christians of the Apostolic tradition live far away from other Orthodox Christians and as it is not easy for everyone to go there, I thought I might tell about my experience in words and pictures, so as to enable the reader "to travel" with me and discover this Indian Oriental Orthodox community. The following texts are made up of interviews I had in Kerala in September 1994. I felt that this journalistic way of listening directly to some Indian Orthodox personalities speaking about their own church life would be a more objective approach. So you will hear these people as if you are meeting them personally and, at the same time, you will see pictures of many Indian Orthodox people and places. As there is nothing more rewarding than personal encounter, I am adding some contact addresses at the end of the book.

I want this book to be accessible to anyone interested in the subject and to many Orthodox Christians around the world, specially in Asia, and also in Australia, as the "National Council of Churches in Australia" includes several Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches. That is why I have written it in a simple and direct style, and in English, which is not my mother tongue. I am much indebted to Mrs Tomoko Faerber-Evdokimov and Mr Robert Faerber who have so kindly given their time to correct my English.

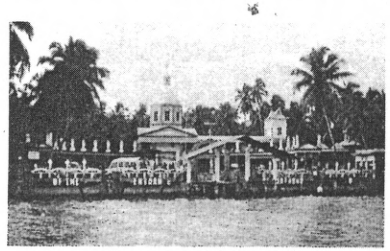
I also want to thank very sincerely His Holiness the Catholicos Mar Thomas Mattthews II and all the bishops, priests, and lay people, as well as Mr C.I. Itty, who have helped me write these pages. Special thanks are due to Bishop Mar Osthatios, to Father Kurian Daniel of Tiruvala, to Mr Matthew my good angel in Kottayam, and to professor E. Jacob John of Pathanamthitta, without forgetting our friend Shiva who drove me many miles by *rickshaw;* they all assisted me greatly in my travels. Many thanks are due to Father K.M. George, the vice-principal of the Seminary, who kindly helped me with some corrections and who honoured me by writing the preface, as he is a strong artisan of the theological dialogue for unity between the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches.



Chapter I

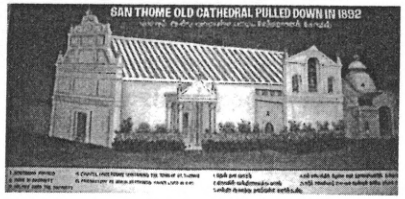
Short History

It is said that Saint Thomas landed by the year 52 in the South West of India in Kerala, in the harbour of Muziris, the modern name of which is Kodungallur or Cranganore, at the mouth of the Periyar river. This costal region, also called Malabar or Malenkar, is 540 kilometres long. Already in ancient times, this sea coast was a place for trade exchange between Arabia and China during the monsoon season.



According to tradition, Saint Thomas converted many Brahmans of the Hindu priestly cast to Christianity as well as Nayar aristocrats belonging to a military caste, and even Jews. There is still a Jewish community living in Kerala. It is believed that Saint Thomas established seven churches, in Muziris, Palur, Parur, Kokkamamgalam, Chayal, Niranam, and Quilon, which remained important Christian centers. Tradition also tells that Saint Thomas preached in places as far as Malacca and China. He died as a martyr around 72 in Mylapore near Madras where it is believed he was buried. The place is called Mount Saint Thomas.

It is difficult to summarize the extremely complex history of primitive Christianity in India. The main reason is that ancient documents and archives are very rare for this period, most of them



having been destroyed by the wet tropical climate or by the successive invaders. Only granite crosses and some copper plates with inscriptions have survived; palm leaf strips did not resist destruction.

Written in Edessa around 250, *The Doctrine of the Apostles* records that Thomas was the apostle of India. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, David, bishop of Basrah, went to India around 295-300 to evangelize the country. Another bishop of Edessa, Mar Joseph, is said to have accompanied to India, around 345, a certain Thomas with 400 people from Edessa who migrated there. ~~These~~ later examples show that the Malankara Church was ~~at first~~ affiliated to the east Syrian Church of Persia having its headquarters in Seleucia-Ctesiphon and sharing the east Syriac liturgical language and faith.

One of the first sure references is the account by Cosmas known as the *Indico Pleustus*, the "Indian Sailor", who came from Alexandria and visited India around 520-25. In his *Christian Topography*, he reported the existence of a church in India with a bishop appointed from Persia. Around 823, two Persian bishops seem to have migrated with a colony of families to the town of Quilon.

In fact, from the 7th century on, the Church of Persia considerably expanded in Asia and sent monk missionaries as far as China and Malaysia. It is therefore not astonishing to find this church active in India too.

Occasional travellers of the 14th and 15th centuries, such as Marco Polo, Jordan Catallani, Oderic of Pordenone, John Marignola and Nicolas of Conti, also recorded the existence of Christian communities belonging to the Church of Persia. According to other records, Persian bishops ruled in India between 1490 and 1599 and later in 1708. This church has had an uninterrupted succession and is still present in India now.

After the landing of Vasco of Gama in India in 1498, the arrival of Portuguese Catholic missionaries brought radical changes to the history of the church in India which up to then had been a united church. The newcomers found there Christians using the East Syrian prayers in the Syriac language. They wanted to convert these "heretics" to the Roman Catholic Church and they prevented the Persian bishops from landing in India. In 1557, a Catholic archbishopric was

set up in the new capital in Goa. In 1599, at the Synod of Diamper, the rite and worship of the Thomas Christians were completely latinized and most of the books written in Syriac were burnt. But some Indian Christians rebelled and, in 1653, took an oath in Mattanchery near Cochin not to submit any longer to the Roman authority (the 'Coonen Cross' revolt).

In 1661-63, the Protestant Calvinist Dutch conquered the towns of Quilon, Cranganore, and Cochin and ordered the foreign priests and missionaries to leave the country. The Indians sent letters asking Oriental Christian prelates for help. Thus the west Syrian Patriarch of Antioch sent metropolitan Mar Gregorios (+1672), who arrived in Cochin in 1665, and contacts were started between the Indian church and the west Syrian church, whose liturgy and doctrine were introduced. Mar Gregorius granted valid ordination to the Indian Mar Thoma I (+1673). In 1708, Metropolitan Mar Gabriel was sent by the east Syrian Patriarch to reclaim his flock and Mar Thomas IV (1688-1728) opposed him. In 1751, the west Syrian Patriarch sent three bishops to India and one of them, Mar Gregorios, ordained the Indian Mar Thomas VI in 1772 under the name of Mar Dionysius I (+1808).

In 1772, a little independant church of the Syrian Orthodox faith, worship, and rite was founded and established in Thozhiur.

There were Muslim merchants in Kerala from early Islamic times on, but Islam effectively spread in the 12th century only. In 1780-92, the Travancore and Cochin areas were invaded by Tippu, the Muslim sultan of Mysore. Christians were killed and churches were burnt down. At that time, the general head-quarters of the Church were moved from Ankamali to Kottayam.

Under Mar Thomas VII (+1809) a Trust Fund was established.

After the domination of the Portuguese and of the Dutch, the British arrived and chased the Dutch from Cochin in 1795/6. In 1816, the Church Missionary Society (=C.M.S) of the Church of England arrived ready to cooperate with the Indian Orthodox Christians. An Orthodox theological Seminary was founded in 1815. From 1833 on, a number of reforms were suggested by the Anglicans. At the Mavelikara Synod, in 1836, the Indian Orthodox rejected these proposals and decided to keep their traditional worship and faith. After this, the connection with the C.M.S. stopped and the administration of property had to be settled.

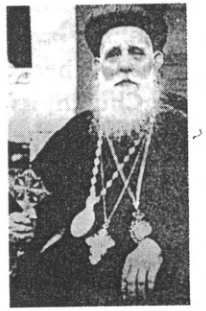
The first translation of the Bible from Syriac to vernacular Malayalam was made by Syrian Indians encouraged by the Anglican missionaries and printed in 1811, followed by another edition in 1830.

After the award made by the Court in 1840, known as the Cochin Award, a group of Orthodox Christians, under the leadership of *malpan* Abraham, remained with the Anglican Church and, in 1889, became an independant church called the Mar Thoma Syrian Church; its first bishop, Mathews Mar Athanasius (+1877), was ordained by the Syrian Patriarch Ignace Elias II in Mardin.

Other Indians, under the influence of Anglican missionaries, became Anglicans. They are now members of the Church of South India.

After the arrival of the Syrian Patriarch Peter III (+1895) in India in 1875, a synod was convened in Mulanturutti in Cochin State in 1876 to settle the relations of the Church in India with the Syrian patriarchal See, in the line of what had been done at the Synod of Mavelikara in 1836. In 1876-77, Patriarch Peter III divided the Church in India into 7 dioceses and appointed 7 metropolitans. He did not recognise Mar Dionysios V as the head of the Church in India. In 1889, the Royal Court of Final Appeal of India, however, recognised him as the Metropolitan of the Syrian Church in India. When he died in 1909, the Association representing the Church in India asked for Geevarghese Dionysios VI to be appointed Metropolitan in his place. Patriarch Abdallah (1906-15) came to India in 1909 and appointed the Indian Mar Kurilos president of the Association and Malankara Metropolitan, and excommunicated Dionysios VI (1909-34) who had been chosen by some Indians. Mar Dionysios's party invited Mar Abdul Massih, the Syrian Patriach from 1895 on who had been deposed by an edict of the Sultan of Turkey in 1905, but was still recognised by some as the legitimate Patriarch. He arrived in India in 1912 and ordained the first Indian Catholicos, Moran Mar Baselios I Paulos (1912-14), and he authorized the Indian church to ordain its future Catholicos and bishops and to bless the *myron* (holy oil), whilst recognizing the spiritual supremacy of the Syrian Patriarch. Two groups came to face each other: the party desiring "autocephaly" and the "patriarchal" party. Both claimed their rights concerning the trust fund and church properties, which entailed a series of civil suits and court of appeal awards from 1913 to 1958.

The autocephalous Catholicos's seat remained vacant from 1914 to 1925, then Baselius Geevarghese I (+1928) and Baselius Geevarghese II (1929-64) succeeded each other. Mar Julius was the Syrian Patriarch's representative from 1924 to 1962.



In 1930, another church division took place when the Orthodox Mar Ivanios (+1953) and Mar Severios and some followers joined the Roman Catholic Church while keeping their liturgy and customs. This led to the foundation of the Uniate Syro-Malankara Church.

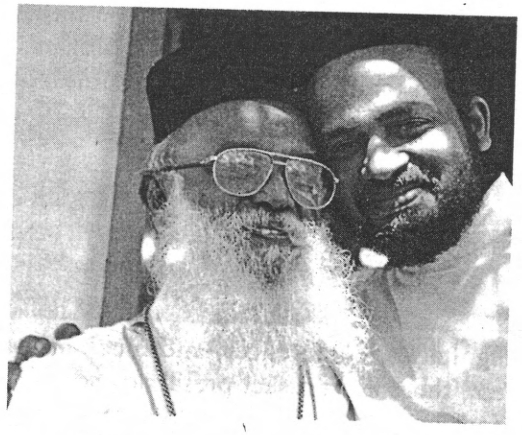
In 1931, the Syrian Patriarch Elias III visited India: he did not recognize the Catholicate of Malankara but he repealed Mar Dionysios VI's excommunication. In 1934, a written Constitution was adopted by the autocephalous Syrian Christian Association of Malankara.

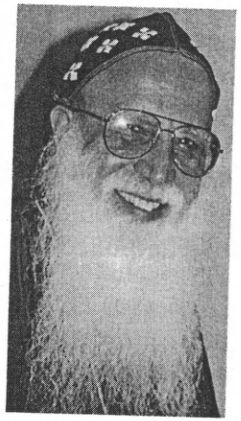
In 1958, a judgement by the Supreme Court of India declared the autonomy of the Catholicos's party. In the same year, the Syrian Patriarch Ignatius Yacoub III (1957-80) recognized Mar Baselios Geevarghese II as the Catholicos of India; letters of acceptance and mutual recognition were exchanged in Kottayam in December 1958. In 1964, Patriarch Yacoub III enthroned Mar Augen Timotheos as Catholicos under the name of Moran Mar Baselios Augen I (1964-75). Both Patriarch Yacoub and Catholicos Augen took part in the Conference of the leaders of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in Addis Abeba in 1965. On April 14th 1967, the Constitution was amended.

But in 1972, disputes started again and the Patriarch sent an Apostolic delegate to India. In 1974, Patriarch Yacoub suspended Catholicos Augen and installed a new Catholicos, Metropolitan Mar Philoxenos, under the name of Baselios Mar Paulos II. The autocephalous Church appointed Mar Mathews Athanasius in 1975 as Baselios Mar Thomas Mathews I.

On the 21st of June 1995, the Supreme Court of India returned a verdict in favour of the autocephalous Church of India. There is hope for the reunion of the two sides.

The following chapters will be about the autocephalous Orthodox Church in India whose see is in Devalokam in Kottayam. It calls itself the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India and its Catholicos is Mar Thomas Matthew II.





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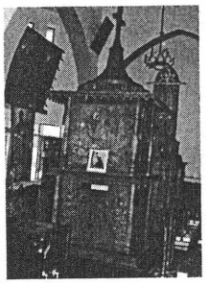
Chapter II

Church Administration

This chapter gives a general idea of the organization of the Church with the main administration run by the Catholicosate in Devalokam.

In 1951, new headquarters were set up in Devalokam, a suburb of Kottayam. The new Catholicate Palace was built in 1961, with the offices of the Catholicos, his private chapel as well as spacious meeting halls for visiting dignitaries, conferences, and meetings of the Holy Synod. In the church, there are a casket preserving some of the relics of Saint Thomas and the tombs of the Catholicoses Moran Mar Geevarghese II(1929-64) and Moran Mar Augen (1964-75).



One morning when visiting the Catholicosate, I saw buses bringing believers coming to see the place and to venerate the relics of Saint Thomas, and to pray in front of the tombs of the Catholicoses.

On the premises of the Palace there are the administration offices, where I learnt about the day to day administration of the church, its finances, public relations, etc.

The Synod of the Indian Orthodox bishops, presided by the Catholicos, is responsible for upholding the faith and the church discipline. For the temporal administration, the Synod works together with the managing committee of the Malankara Syrian Christian Association, in which each parish is represented by one priest and two laymen. This means that lay people actively participate in the management of the church. The Association elects two associate trustees, a clergy trustee and a layman trustee, who, together with the Catholicos, manage the community's properties and finances.

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India follows the canons (*Hudaya*) written by Bar Hebraeus (1266-86), the Catholicos of the East of the Syrian Orthodox Church, which also rule the West Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch.

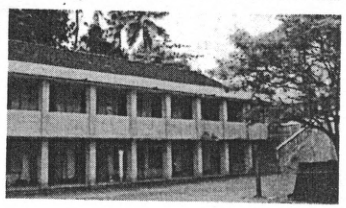
The Sunday School Association is located in another building. Here the material for Sunday schools and Bible study is prepared and sent all over India as well as to the diaspora. This material is in Malayalam and in English for the diaspora.

The main publication of the church, the monthly *Malankara Sabha Magazine*, founded at the end of the 19th century, has been printed here since 1964; it reports matters concerning the faith and the history of the church. Among other **church publications**, there is the *Star of the East* (quarterly, in English, published by the Delhi Orthodox Centre), *The Light* (quarterly, in English and Hindi, published by the Calcutta Diocese), *Deepthi* (annual publication of the Seminary), *Purohitan* (published three times a year by the Clergy Association), and *Orthodox Youth* (in Malayalam with some articles in English).

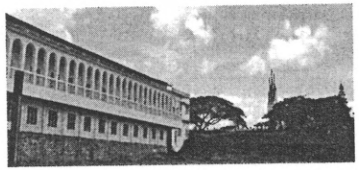
As concerns education, the Mar Dionysios (M.D.) Seminary and the M.D. High School were established already in 1893. The

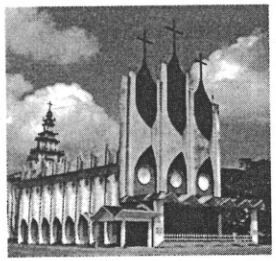
Catholicate College was founded in 1952. Today the Catholicate office takes care of the 17 church **Colleges** which are managed by Bishop Philipos Mar Eusebios. More than 200 **schools** are run by various agencies. In 1962, the schools were placed under a corporate management. The church also runs 5 teacher **training colleges** and 12 **Industrial Training Centres** (I.T.C.).

In 1888, the place called **M.D. Seminary Campus** in Kottayam was purchased by the Malankara Church where the oldest Orthodox Church school was opened in 1893. Today

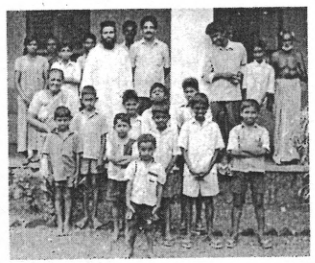


there are 1600 students, boys and girls, Christians and non-Christians, who all wear white up and blue down uniforms. In 1933, Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysios opened a theological training seminary. This campus now comprises the Mar Dionysios (M.D.) High School, the Mar Baselius College and an auditorium (1964), as well as other centres. Many historical assemblies, including those of the Malankara Association, have taken place there. On this compound the Mar Elia Chapel founded in 1896 became the cathedral in 1966 and was reconstructed in 1984.





The Church runs 16 **orphanages** generally managed by monks and nuns. When visiting the M.G.M. Abhaya Bhavan orphanage in Pampady near Kottayam, I was deeply moved by the kindness and humanity of Father Jacob towards the boys. Even though he is a married priest with two children, he and a deacon look after the 16 boys, from 6 to 18 years old; some are Christians, others are Hindus who are not baptised but participate in the prayer life. He loves the orphans so much that he spends more time in the orphanage than at home and he prefers this work to any other. For him, this vocation comes from God, and he feels his presence when working with the boys. He is also in charge of the old people's home which hosts 40 elderly women and men; Sister Hanna looks after the women in one house, the men live in another near by.



As concerns **social welfare**, the **Basilios Mar Thomas Charity Fund** was established in 1977. Its aim is to help in case of natural calamities (flood, famine, earthquake), to assist the sick and the disabled, to grant scholarships, to pay for the wedding expenses for the needy. For instance, after the cyclone in Andhra Pradesh in 1977, the church participated for the first time in the national relief programme by building houses and a community hall for which Father K.I. Philip of Saint Paul's Monastery became the responsible person. In 1979, the Child Welfare Board was established.

In the field of social projects, Father T.J. Joshua, the previous vice-principal of the Theological Seminary and the director of the Sunday School programme, told me that in 1994 a 4 storey building was built by the church to accommodate needy sick people in Kottayam. Part of the costs were paid by Orthodox Christians living in the Gulf countries, where they get high salaries. In most families, one or two members go abroad to raise enough money to pay for the studies of their children and to help their families staying in India. When they return and settle again in India, they build big houses and, more especially, they help the Church and its social programmes. The financial support given by the diaspora is considerable.

There are two institutions for mentally retarded children. In Trivandrum, there is a rehabilitation centre for the blind. There is also a cancer relief and aid fund center in Trivandrum sponsored by Metropolitan Osthatios of Tiruvala. Father T.J. Joshua, who himself had cancer in 1992 and was miraculously cured, has real concern and sympathy for patients who have cancer. He is now the director of an new institution for poor people suffering of cancer. He regularly visits Orthodox schools to encourage the students to participate in fund raising. The disease seems to be spreading, as there are about 300 cancer patients coming everyday to Kottayam hospital. Some patients are very poor and cannot pay the 500 roupies for one chimiotherapy injection (one US dollar is about 30 roupies and the average monthly salary of a teacher is about 3000 roupies).

A number of **hospitals** were founded by the church: the Medical Mission Hospital in Kolencherry (1964) is the largest church hospital with 500 beds. There are also the

Mar Theodosius Memorial Hospital in Sasthamkotta in Quilon, and the Saint Mar Gregorius Hospital in Parumala (1968). All together there are 21 hospitals and medical centres run by the Malankara Orthodox Church. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church Medical Mission was registered in 1977. In each hospital, a chaplain caters for the spiritual needs of the sick and of the staff with prayers and Bible classes. There are also numerous health care centres.

As for the Syrian Indian Church of the Patriarchate of Antioch, called the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, its theological, liturgical, ecclesiastical and daily life is exacly the same. But this church has its own Catholicos and a Synod of 12 bishops. Its administration is as follows, according to the principal of the seminary Father Addai Jacob. The Seminary, with 30 students and 16 staff members, affiliated to the Serampore University near Calcutta, built anew in 1988 in Vetikel near Mulanthuruthi, 25 kilometres east of Cochin airport, is so to speak the spiritual head-quarters of the church as well as the centre of the different associations of women, students, youth, and clergy. It is also the centre for social work, ecumenism, and publications. There are about 500 large parishes, with 550 priests. The church runs 5 hospitals, 10 schools, 3 colleges and 1 engineering college, 3 orphanages, 4 convents, and 2 monasteries.

Even though it has its own Catholicos, the Indian Orthodox autocephalous Church respects the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch whose name is mentionned during the liturgy.

As for the spiritual organizations of the autocephalous Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, this will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Chapter III

Spiritual Organizations

Today the mission of the Church is mainly in the hands of the spiritual organizations. Among the first established Indian Orthodox associations, there are the Students' Movement (1908), the Society of the Servants of the Cross (1924), and the Evangelistic Association of the East (1924). The Orthodox Syrian Sunday School Association of the East was founded in 1933 and the Youth Movement started in 1936. In 1977, the Orthodox Vacation Bible School (OVBS) merged with the Sunday School Association. In 1978, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church Mission Society was registered. In 1980, the Malankara Mission Board was inaugurated.

The spiritual organizations of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India are very active and play an important role in the life of the church. The 11 main organizations will be described now; they are listed as following in the Church diary printed yearly by the Mar Orthodox Christian Student Movement of India: 1) the Orthodox Syrian Sunday School Association of the East, 2) the Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement of India, 3) the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement of the East, 4) the Orthodox Christian Bala Samajam, 5) the Orthodox Christian Balika Samajam, 6) the Saint Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sangam, 7) the Malankara Orthodox Baskiyamma Association, 8) the Martha Mariam Vanitha Samajam, 9) the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church Mission Society, 10) the Saint Paul's and Saint Thomas's Suvishesha Sangam, and 11) the Servants of the Cross. For adresses look at the end of the book.

These projects are so numerous that I could only visit a few places and interview only some of their leaders.

I) The Orthodox Syrian Sunday School Association of the East

The Association took its present shape in 1933. Its patron is the Catholicos, assisted by a metropolitan and a general director, Father

T.J. Joshua from 1994 on, who co-ordinates the academic and administrative activities. A publication officer is in charge of the publications and text books. Each diocese has its own director. Spiritual education is given in all parishes to all children from the age of 5 on and through 12 grades, after which they receive a certificate. In Sunday Schools children are taught the Holy Bible as well as the faith and the history of the church. There has been an annual convention for more than 70 years.

The Sunday school textbooks include 24 lessons each for a 2 months' course. Twenty textbooks are available in Malayalam and 10 in English for the students of the Church living outside Kerala or in the diaspora and who do not know Malayalam.

There is a parallel educational programme called the Orthodox Vocation Bible School (OVBS), which offers a daily Bible study programme for two weeks during the holidays, with a distinct theme for each session. It also produces a cassette of new songs every year. It was started in 1959 by Father P.T. Cherian. The programmes include singing, handicraft, painting, worship, and agape meals on feast days.

The Sunday School Centre is located in the Catholicate premises in Devalokam in Kottayam and this is what its director, Father T.J. Joshua, told me in an interview :

"The Sunday Schools Association is one of the biggest and best organized institutions of the church. There are about 1000 Sunday school units, in the parishes and even in some private houses. Our people give great emphasis and attention at organising them. The programme was adopted more than 20 years ago after the Oriental Orthodox Churches together had adopted a common curriculum; so the text books were first written in English and then translated into the different local languages, for classes of grades 1 to 12, according to the secular education system. Sunday schools are held after the liturgy on Sundays or on Sunday afternoons, in the churches. We don't have the same facilities as in the western countries: sometimes

Sunday schools are held under a tree, as accomodation is not always easy. Each of the 20 dioceses has its own Sunday school director. During the year there are competitions and examinations and the best students receive prices. We encourage them in Church music, elocution, theatre, to develop their talents in art, painting, literature, and not only to study from their Sunday school books! Since 1993 we have kept one Sunday as a day of mercy and love and children go and offer the money they gathered to some charitable institution. So the Sunday school children are trained to give, to share what they have with other people, to show as well love and concern for the unhappy and the less fortunate ones. These students are also trained in leading the worship. There are many things I hope to accomplish in the coming years. We have to update the text books. We have to train better the Sunday school teachers; most of them are interested in Church activities, but they don't have the training. In 1994, we began to have a teachers' training orientation camp; then these people go to the various dioceses and train others. In 1994 we began a project of Bible reading cards: each student is given a card in order to encourage him or her to read the whole Bible in three years, systematically and by himself or herself".

As for Sunday school teaching, Father Joshua concludes: "As a child, I was living in a very hilly rural place, difficult to reach, where the church was thatched with palm leaves and walled with wooden planks. Actually I was very influenced by my own Sunday School teacher who was the person who really touched my heart. He did not even have a shirt to put on, but only the Indian traditional clothes: a *doty*, a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist, and a piece of cloth on his shoulder. He was not really a highly educated man, in the secular understanding of this word. But he was a spiritual man who influenced me to a great extent through his devotion, fasting and other things. Even though I have been in different theological institutions and studied under learned professors with doctorates, but still I see that the teaching and the life of my Sunday school teacher, this simple man, really influenced me more than anything else in my life. His way of telling stories was fantastic and I remember it. He was not a good musician, but still his story telling part was very impressive. During the long worship service, he was standing with the children, asking them to fold their hands and look at the altar. He was really an

inspiring person. Whenever I go to my native parish, I visit his tomb and I pray for him. I think there are here and there such good teachers who are really the gems of the Church, devoted and sincere teachers who have a real spiritual life through fasting, prayer, devotion: such people have a very lasting impact on the younger generation".

Father Joshua also recalls the responsibility of the family for teaching the faith: "My mother was also of great influence for me and my children. I remember that, when I was five, I nearly died of pneumonia and my mother had no hope that I would live. She promised to dedicate me to the service of God if I survived and then she used to remind me of her prayer. So my mother also helped me to develop my spiritual life and to keep my awareness of serving God. She prayed a lot and inspired the children to attend worship. During her last days in my home, she used to spread the mat on the floor for our family prayers and Bible reading in the evening. She knew the Bible very well, she could not read because of her bad eyes, but she was listening all the time and then correcting if the children made a mistake".

2) Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement of India (MGOCSM)

This movement is the organization of the college and university students of the Malankara Orthodox Church. It was initiated in 1908 as an annual Syrian students' conference to deepen spiritual life, to create a more lively sense of fellowship, and to lead students to be actively faithful in the church, which explains its later motto: "worship, study, service". The Syrian students' Conference was reorganized by its secretary, Father Paul Verghese, and became in 1956 the Orthodox Christian Student Movement of India. It may be one of the largest (60,000 students) and oldest youth movements in Asia. Its work and conferences are decided by the yearly general assembly composed of 3 delegates from each unit. Its activites are numerous, from Bible studies, debates, retreats, pilgrimages, parish mission, work camps, to social service projects such as visiting and helping the poor, the sick, the old people, the

orphans, and giving blood. It has a number of branches in various places: High School, Art and Science College, Medical and Technical engineering Auxiliaries, the School Teacher Orthodox Christian Association, the Missionary Forum, and the Literary and Cultural Forum. It also provides hostel facilities in three students' centers, one in Kottayam since 1973, another in Trivandrum since 1977, and one in Alwaye. MGOCSM publishes a monthly magazine, the *Orthodox Youth*, together with the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement, with whom it cooperates and has common activities. Its central office is in the Orthodox Student Centre in Kottayam where it also runs a bookshop and a publishing house and sells video tapes. The Mar Gregorios Blind Rehabilitation Centre has been established in Trivandrum by the Medical and Technical Auxiliaries of MGOCSM.

Bishop Mar Theofilos of Bombay was its president in 1994 and Father John Thomas its general secretary. They both stressed the importance of offering worship and spiritual nurture to the students during their studies.

3) The Orthodox Christian Youth Movement of the East

This is the non-student youth movement organized at parish level. There are more than 800 youth units in the 20 dioceses. It also organizes Bible study classes, retreats, seminars, leadership training programmes. It provides scholarships, medical and financal assistance to needy and sick people. It also helps the Sunday school and other religious movements in the church. Its centre is located in Saint Paul's Mission Training Centre in Mavelikara. Its president is a bishop, its general secretary is appointed by the Catholicos. The Executive Committee is made up of 7 people. The Central Committee includes the Executive Committee and it is the decision making body. The general assembly and the diocesan general assembly meet once every three years. On that occasion, there are elections for all positions, except for that of the general secretary who can remain in office. In the Central Committee there are 7 departments: 1) organisation of the annual programme, 2) theological studies and publications of material on faith and Bible, also for free distribution, 3) cultural

department for training programmes in art and literature, 4) girls' department, 5) finance department to collect money, 6) anti-addiction department against drugs and alcohol, 7) eye and blood donors' forum. The present Catholicos was the first president of this movement.

Mr Abraham Thalavady, the principal of Saint Cyril's college in Adoor and a leader of the Youth Movement of the Indian Orthodox Church in 1994, told me: "Representatives gather each year for study classes almost all based on Orthodox faith, and discussions. Youth also have annual conferences on the diocesan level for all young people from 16 to 35. Our bishops also join and share their experience, they are our guiding forces. The motto of the Youth Association is "Worship, study and service", that is to pray in the Church, to conduct the worship in a beautiful way, as in our Orthodox tradition. This beauty you can find only in the Orthodox church. Young people actively participate in the worship of the church and contribute with their own abilities to make it more beautiful. In public meetings the youth preach and give a testimony of Jesus to the people.

As for service activities, the young people, for instance, sometimes visit a leprosy college near Adoor; then a liturgy is organised and attended by our young people who want to show their love and concern. The Orthodox leprous people take communion. Then there is a common meal, with the food being brought and shared by the youth. Youth also do other social services, they visit families, they evangelize, they look after and decorate the premises of the church.

As concerns their study work there is a saying: when you go for preaching, you must have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other! So we want to keep our youth informed and make them study the Orthodox faith, the Bible, and at the same time keep them in touch with the present age. In the field of service, specially in India, the church cannot stand apart from the society, so the youth have to do something for the society. We train our young people to become good leaders for the well-being of the society, to play their own role in the place where they are living. It means taking initiatives, planning, criticizing, collectively, with all individuals at work, sharing efforts and creativity. The driving force is love, the love of Christ. The youth follow the cardinal principles of our Church, believing in the Holy Trinity, leading a sacramental life. Now we are concentrating on the family aspect because in Indian tradition we are very proud of the family relationships. But the modern trend is to abandon this tradition. So young people are sometimes frustrated. In my parish, we conducted a two day programme for young couples, to help them understand how to live a married life in a Christian way. My brothers and sisters and myself used to learn the Church songs from my mother and father. Our neighbours sang in the same way, the whole family together, specially during Lent. Now this atmosphere is lacking. But, anyhow, we cannot deviate from our Orthodox tradition which cannot be changed and will always remain with us. My children may have different experiences, but still, they are Orthodox, they still believe what I believe. My eldest daughter who is 21 has joined a graduate course. Today was the opening day. Yesterday she went to pray on the tomb of Saint Gregorius in Parumala. She keeps the Orthodox tradition, and so do many other young people. My father was a head master and used to pray a lot. The circumstances do not allow me to pray as much, but still I have the same faith. Our faith will not fade away. We still keep the ancient liturgy and Church tradition".

Father Jobson Kottapurath, the general secretary of the Orthodox Youth Movement of the East since 1995, told me that new events are being organized, such as youth gatherings in Parumala, to pray, fast, and keep silence together. The youth also collect the money they would have paid for the food they did not eat on fasting days and give it to funds for the poor. Training in self-employement skills is organized to face unemployement. There are sessions during which young people are informed about how to prevent AIDS, alcoholism, and in other seminars they discuss ecology or even government politics.

Both Youth Associations are members of *Syndesmos*, the worldwide Orthodox Youth Association. The international Orthodox Youth day declared by *Syndesmos* on February the 2nd is cele-

brated, as well as another Orthodox national youth day on the Sunday after Easter.

4) The Orthodox Christian Bala Samajam

This association trains young boys up to the age of 13 for leadership in church activities.

5) The Orthodox Christian Balika Samajam

This association also trains young girls up to the age of 13 for leadership in Church activities.

6) The Saint Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sangam

This is the organization of the clergy with a general assembly every 3 years. It has a fund to help some priests financially, for medical care, and for scholarships for priests' children. Its secretary is Father Johnes Abraham Konat.

7) The Malankara Orthodox Baskiyamma Association

This association organizes meetings for priests' wives.

8) The Martha Mariam Vanitha Samajam (Saint Mary's Association)

Towards 1920, there were scattered prayer groups of Orthodox women in parishes which led to the formation of a womens' spiritual organization in all Kerala for the enlightement in the Orthodox tradition and for social and economic activities. These women conduct Church activities and Bible classes, meditation and study classes, explaining to other women the theological faith and spiritual meaning of the liturgy and prayers, specialy during Lent; they also cooperate with Sunday schools, vacation Bible classes and social welfare centres. Each branch is under the spiritual guidance of the parish priest and of the local bishop. There is a secretary in each of the 20 dioceses.

Its general secretary is Mrs Accamma Paul who lives near

Mavelikara. When she was 48, she decided to study and she completed a B.A. in political sciences and economics. Now she dedicates all her life to helping women in Kerala and in India. She participates in the Ecumenical Church Council programme and in the All India Christian Women's Council (AICWC) related to the National Council of Churches in India. Her in-laws were very Orthodox believers dedicated to the church. Her husband's brother was a Cabinet minister. Her mother-in-law was also Samajam's secretary. Mrs Accamma told me that in each of the 20 dioceses there are women's groups and the responsible secretaries regularly meet as a Central Commitee on the premises of the central office in Kottayam. There is also a nursery school there and a sewing training class, still under construction. The president is bishop H.G. Zacharia Mar Antonios, bishop of Koratty, and the vice-president is Father E.G. George. Women do not participate in church committees as yet, but it is changing now.

Mrs Accamma Paul visits all the dioceses, attends the diocese conferences, and gives speeches and instructions in presence of the local bishop and of priests. In each diocese, women attend Bible and singing classes, leadership training, they organize humanitarian projects such as making building homes for poor women, widows, and orphans, helping aged people and young couples wanting to get married. Mrs Accamma meets with many poor people, serving them, whether they are Christians or not, and she tells other women to do the same, that is to pray and serve others by helping them solve their problems, by providing food cards and social welfare, by giving proper medical care and legal advice.

Sometimes there are social and legal problems, as shown by the following examples. In India, many marriages are still arranged by the families, and there is a need for spiritual counselling before and after. Legally, the dowry system is abolished, but the ancient Indian custom still prevails, and the bride must still bring a certain amount of money as dowry, which can create financial problems. On the other hand, the amount of the dowry is not recorded, so, if the husband dies, or if there is a divorce, which is seldom the case, the wife cannot get the money back. According to ancient laws, women did not have equal rights to their father's inheritance. This was changed in 1951

and equality is now the law. But some people continue to apply the ancient law. Uneducated women do not know what to do in such cases, and it is up to Christian women to inform and help them. As Mrs Accamma Paul told me: "Many times women don't know how to get help, so we teach them. Our Orthodox tradition is to praise God. So I ask the women not to demand things but to give themselves to God and He will give what everyone needs. On the spiritual level, to recite our traditional prayers is good because they include requests concerning everything in life. I tell the women: "You must keep the Orthodox tradition, the teaching of Christ and you must at the same time do modern social work in order to respond to the necessities of the world. You must be and live as a Christian not only by name, but also by action". Our motto is "work, prayer and enlightement", that is to give light to others. We must serve. Our work is service and prayer. Prayer is a must. That is the spiritual teaching we give to women. We teach them to be busy in family and social life so that the family background will come up, so that the children can study and have a better life and so even the Church will have a better life".

9) The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church Mission Society

This concerns mission in general. Its president is the Catholicos. There are 10 Mission Centres under church guidance.

10) The Saint Paul's and Saint Thomas' Suvishesha Sangam

These missionary activities take place on parish level. Its president is Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Osthatios. The office is in Saint Paul's Mission Training Centre (M.T.C.) in Mavelikara near Tiruvala.

11) The Servants of the Cross

Founded in 1924 in Mavelikara by Bishop Petros Osthatios of Tiruvala, the Society of the Servants of the Cross is the oldest missionary organization of the Orthodox Church in India. In this centre missionaries are trained in a three year course. A new centre will be opened in North India. In 1979, a mission board was set up. Bishop Mar Osthatios became its president and he told me: "Our priority in

mission is to proclaim the love of Christ to the world, through a community life style of Incarnation. So we started nurseries and children's homes for non-Christians. The children sing Christian hymns, they participate in the prayer life, but conversion is never imposed. Indian Orthodox Christians must witness the love of Christ, but not practice the colonial type of mission. We can offer Christ, we cannot impose Him. What is important is to share the love of Christ. Parents of poor children are so happy when we can help them in their education. Anyone can be a missionary. Mission is a trinitarian agape of divine eternal love that came into the world first in the creation, then in Incarnation and then in sending the Holy Spirit. This love of Christ is what Hindu and Muslims can understand. In Hinduism, in the ultimate philosophy of the mystic philosopher Shankara (11th century), God is beyond love and hate, God is above all opposites, God is *nirguna*, without attribute. But we Christians say that God is three Persons in the Holy Trinity. Christians must share their life style, because of the sharing in the trinitarian theology. We must apply that in life and autopraxis. We must explain the trinitarian theology as an inclusive and not an exclusive one. The triune God is God of all. Theologically speaking we must explain the cosmic christology of the Orthodox Fathers. People can understand if we explain in a simple way this relationship of love within the Trinity".

In an article about mission Mar Osthatios wrote that his church has "to evolve a methodology of mission which is consonant with the essence of Orthodox spirituality and at the same time takes the needs of India into special consideration and that ... the whole Church has to become conscious of its missionary obligations".

Philipos Mar Eusebios, the vice-president of the mission board, told me that "today mission must be done for the life witness of the people and that in daily life, in worship life, in social life, to be good witness in society, among ordinary people.We don't believe in making noise. If you go on crusades it is a mockery. We have a convention, study classes, conferences. and social activity programmes for the sake of the well-being of the people, with homes for orphans and aged people, to help victims of natural disasters, etc. This is the way

to express our Christian witness and commitment, we work for people with problems, as preaching is only one aspect of mission. Our lives must preach, spontaneously, not only our mouths. Mission is the other side of worship. What we worship in the church must be expressed and experienced tangibly in the outside world, in the life at large. The Christian life is not isolated inside the church. Our lives must be spreading all over, wherever we are, in work, in the factory, in the farm, our witness must be there. We receive our spiritual strength from worship and sacramental life, from the Bible and from the life witness of so many faithful people. Christian witness is to be witnessed as the total man in a total situation, as the total community is evangelistic. People have to be educated to get that consciousness. I have seen real missionaries who live and die for the people, as ordinary people among other ordinary people, craving for no power or privilege. Our ideal is to lead a life of Christian witness so that people may get a Christian message and live worthily, never in a forced manner. We must present Christian life in the most Christian way so that Christ speaks to them".

As a conclusion we can say that the interrelation of all these associations on parish and monastic levels shows the fellowship of all church people and allows the social and missionary spirit and action to be brought to different places by different people and in different ways.

Chapter IV

Life in the dioceses

There are 21 dioceses in the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church. The metropolitans appoint the parish priests. The life and activities in each diocese are quite similar. I interviewed Metropolitan Philipos Mar Eusebios of the diocese of Thumpamon in Pathanamthitta, south of Kottayam, an area where there are many Indian Orthodox people. In that diocese there are 106 parishes and 5000 families. Mar Eusebius is in charge of the different church movements, such as the mission board, and he is also the manager of the colleges. He used to be the president of the MGOCSM. In 1955, he became a monk of the Christa Sishya Ashram. He studied in Bangalore, Calcutta, and later at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches, at Bossey near Geneva. He has lived in the Seminary with the students for 13 years and he teaches church history, ecumenics and mission.

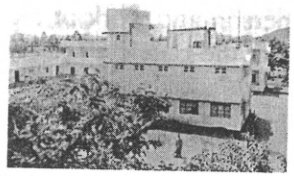
The activities of his diocese include the following: some are traditional like the Sunday Schools, the youth movements, the students' movement, women's and men's fellowships, the Evangelistic Society, with branches in each parish. Other projects aim at improving the situation of poor people with problems. In most of these projects, the church also helps Hindus and Muslims. The diocese builds homes for the homeless; this has already been done in 69 parishes. It also sponsors education for children of poor families in schools and colleges and industrial training centres (teaching short-hand, electronics, automobile mechanics, the skills to be draughtsman, electrician) run by the church, and there is

a fund for poor people who are sick. There is also a marriage assistance fund, because dowry and wedding are very expensive. The church is planning a multipurpose centre for counselling and rehabilitation of the disabled. There is also a clergy welfare reserve fund. The church provides interest free cash loans which must be paid back so as to help other people, specially young and unemployed persons. A home for destitute young and elderly women is managed by the sisters of the Saint Mary's Convent, the *mandiram* ("home") in Thumpamon. The sisters also run a pre-primary school and a tailoring training institute for young women. The poor are given free sewing machines after the intraining.

When I asked Metropolitan Philipos Mar Eusebios about the bishop's role, he answered: "There are enough people to take care of the administration, and the bishop's task is essentially spiritual. The bishop must nurture the people, help them to live a Christian evangelical life, teach them the right faith and he must be a spiritual father. He must lay emphasis on spiritual matters and be able to witness through his own life, otherwise he is a failure. The world does not need worldly priests, but spiritual ones. The Body of Christ is often disfigured and so we must put more emphasis on spirituality, only thus can we help and do someting good for the world".

Before becoming a monk, Mar Eusebios worked in the railways and the ship customs, so he knows the ordinary human life, its difficulties and realities. His theology developped "on the rails", as he says, while he lived with people and worked with them. As a teacher, he believes that, before beginning their studies, theological students should work and have practical training for at least two years. To be well balanced, one needs to have a practical daily experience of the world before becoming a theological student.

Geevarghese Mar Osthatios, the Metropolitan of Niranam whose seat is in Tiruvala, is another very busy bishop. He teaches dogmatics, Christian ethics, and missiology in the Seminary. He is also the president of the mission board. He opened mission centres, orphanages and schools, and started other activities in villages in and outside Kerala. He is the founder of the Puthuppady Saint Paul ashram and convent. He supervises Father K.I.



Philip's work in the Saint Gregorios Balagram for boys at Yacharam in Andra Pradesh, as well as in the Saint George Balikagram at Dehu Road in Pune for girls. Among the many social projects for which he is responsible, there are, in Trivandrum, the Karunya Guidance Centre for sick people and the Karunya Visranthi Bhavan for cancer and terminal patients, where free treatment is given as well as accomodation and food for the needy. He has already founded 9 orphanages which host 350 children. He has also set up funds for marriage assistance, for the sick, for building houses for the needy. In Mavelikara there is a mobile mission department whose main aim is to evangelize, to witness, and to render social services. Accompanied by Father K.Y. Wilson, young men visit many villages in a minibus called "Message of love" in order to spread the Gospel by singing and preaching in the open air. Mar Osthatios' whole life and teaching has aimed at applying trinitarian theology to daily life, as he explains in his book *Theology of a Classless Society* (London, 1979),

where he writes : "The ideal thing to do is to imitate the Lord rather than conform to the sociological pressure of our environment... If we do not eat together we are not brothers... In the ideal family each lives for others, no one lives for himself... Profit of one should be profit for all... To love the neighbour, the poor as yourself: this is impossible if we don't have the mind of Christ... Each saint is salt and light for the whole earth... Mission is the flow of eternal love in the very being of the triune God... Mission is the penetration of love, justice and holiness into the fabric of the individual and the society... There is a joy in working for God and others... There is no theology in christianity

which is not a systematic explanation of the person and work of the Holy Trinity (John 17). Therefore the theology of the classless society must be based on the Trinity". Mar Osthatios also told me : " The Church must help the poor. I was a poor boy, a priest helped me for my studies. If he had not helped me I would be a farmer instead of a bishop. We must tell the people to equally share. We must be simple in our style life. We must go to the villages and live and suffer with the people. Bishops must be poor".

Mar Osthatios' bishopric compound in Tiruvala comprises administrative buildings, a chapel, the Mar Baselius Jubilee Centre for meetings and conferences. Opposite there is a hostel for 85 students and women between 16 and 40 years old. As in many other places, I was told about new projects and buildings; here they are beginning to build a home for poor elderly women.

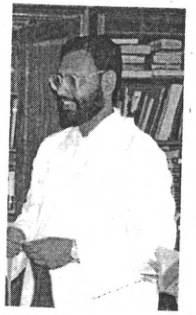
Chapter V

Meeting with two parish priests

The parish life of priests is similar to that in any other Orthodox tradition. As the priest's salary is not high, some wives work outside their homes. Some priests own land with rubber tree plantations, inherited from their fathers. Priests can be engaged in different activities, intellectual or humanitarian. They also teach different subjects in schools and colleges run by the church, more especially Syriac. Some priests have studied psychology and work in this field.

I met many kind and interesting priests and shall now introduce two of them.

Father Johnes Abraham Konat is in charge of the parish of Panpakuda, 5 kilometres from Mamelechery and 50 from Kottayam, which has 750 families. This parish has an important historical background. The parish church of Saint John the Apostle was built in 1825 by a priest who is Father Johnes' ancestor through six generations; he is the 24th priest in his family line in Mamelechery! His priestly ancestors are buried in a little building next to the church and the graveyard, and they are commemorated each year on October 28th and 29th by thousands of people with liturgies and processions to the village. His ancestors gathered a famous collection of Syriac manuscripts, especially his grandfather Mathew Chorepiscopa, which is an honorary title given to some priests. The library of the Konat family is the richest today in the Syrian Orthodox Church of India; it is well known even by foreign scholars and its manuscripts are quoted by J.P.M. van der Ploeg in *"The Christians of Saint Thomas in South India and their Christian Manuscripts"* (Bangalore, 1983, p.159). A catalogue of the manus-



cripts is being prepared. The oldest manuscript is the Nomocanons of Bar Hebraeus (13th century) written shortly after his death. A modern building is under construction to preserve the manuscripts from humidity. It will include a community hall for the village people for cultural events, wedding celebrations, and for teaching; it will be open to everyone, also to non-Christians. Medical care will be given there by doctors from major hospitals, as there are no specialists in the local government hospital. Health courses will be given to the local people. The parish also has a project for a rehabilitation centre for the blind. Father Konat teaches Syriac in the Seminary two days a week and he is responsible for the priests' association, the "Saint Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sangam".

Father V.J. Joseph from Uthimoodu near Pathanamthitta is a parish priest who, like many elderly priests, has had interesting experiences in his church life. His grandfather was himself a priest and a disciple of Saint Gregorios of Parumala and a teacher at the ancient Seminary of Parumala. Father Joseph remembers that as a little child his grandfather took him on his knees at night, to teach him church prayers, songs, and to tell him stories of the saints and the mystical experience and prayer life of the Saint of Parumala; the old priest used to pray and cry at the same time, and sometimes his tears spilled over the little boy's face. So the boy and the affectionate old man were very close. Father Joseph was seven when his grandfather died and he decided to become a priest. Later the diocesan bishop, Geevarghese Mar Philoxenios, took him from the English school to study in his house in Pathanamthitta. When he was thirteen, he was ordained a sub-deacon by the second Catholicos, Mar Basilios Gevarghese II. He also lived and studied with His Holiness Mar Basilios Augen I, who taught the boys to keep the Orthodox faith, to lead moral lives in view of becoming priests, to do good deeds and to help the poor. He was the secretary of these two catholicoses. Father Joseph became a priest when he was 22. He worked and taught in different parishes and states. Now he is 65 and he wants to open a home for old sick people to be nursed by sisters; and he goes from house to house to collect money for this project.

What is important for him is to keep the Orthodox faith and tradition alive and to lead a life of meditation, to kneel before God and to concentrate one's mind on God the Almighty: "From that", he says, "you can receive some spiritual light and good experiences; you can receive everything through meditation. Especially in the monastic life of the Eastern tradition, they used to pray a lot. Prayer is very important. The priest can get real spiritual life and inspiration from prayer and meditation. If we sit at the feet of our Lord and surrender ourselves to Him, He will teach us, guide us, help us and give us the proper answers at the needed time. Mary of Bethany in the Gospel chose the best part by sitting in front of God". So Father Joseph seems to me as being above all a man of prayer.

Having received a call from Christ in February 1985, he went through a unique and deep Christian experience when he walked as a pilgrim all the way about 400 miles (640 kilometres) from Kerala to Mylapore, near Madras, where Saint Thomas died as a martyr. On his way, he used to feed mostly on coconuts. He was dressed in the traditional *sanyasi* orange Indian pilgrim's dress and he had a pilgrim's stick; setting it firmly on the ground, at each step, he prayed: "God help me", at the next step he would say: "Mother of God, pray for us", then: "Saint Thomas, disciple of Jesus Christ, pray for me". When I asked him if he felt like a Christian *sanyasi* when making this very long pilgrimage by himself in our modern world, he answered : "According to my conscience, I want to strongly live my faith and to follow God's call. I heard about saints walking; Saint Thomas himself walked when he came and travelled in India. So I follow this walking tradition".

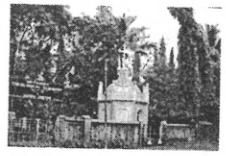
After this pilgrimage, he often went to the forest or to the graveyard and stayed there, sometimes for days, sitting and praying in

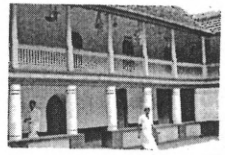
solitude. Meditation and solitude give him strength. Such strength he also receives when helping the poor, for instance in the home for old sick people he is building. This house will be close to the forest where he hopes to go from time to time for meditation. "Prayer and work, he concluded, are important to serve our brothers and sisters".

Chapter VI

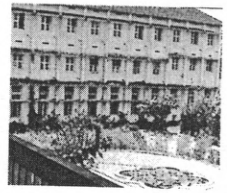
The Seminary and its different activities

The Orthodox theological Seminary is the oldest non-Catholic theological school in India. It was established in 1815 by Metropolitan Mar Dionysios I. The so-called 'Old Seminary' used to be the head-quarters of some of the Indian metropolitans and of the Catholicos. Many important events have taken place here. Even now, the executive body of the whole church, that is the Managing Committee, meets here. The bishops, clergy, lay people deliberate and take decisions for the church. So the Seminary is intimately connected with the whole life of the church.

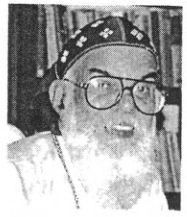




The Seminary has a bachelor of divinity (B.D) curriculum. It has been affiliated to the Serampore (Calcutta) university since 1965. There is also a post-graduate course (M.Th. Master of Theology).



The present Metropolitan of New Delhi, Paulos Mar Gregorios, formerly called Father Paul Verghese, has been its principal since 1967. Father T. J. Joshua, vice-principal from 1984-1994, has been replaced by Father K.M George who was a professor and the associate director of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches at Bossey near Geneva. Father Joshua joined the seminary 39 years ago as a young deacon. He studied at Union Seminary in New York for his bachelor degree and, as a research scholar



in New Testament, at the Ecumenical Institute of Tantur near Bethleem (Israel) for one year. He teaches New Testament and practical theology (homiletics and Christian education). It is from him that I received most of the following information on the Seminary in September 1994, and some from the librarian, Father Cherian.

This is the life in the Seminary. The Seminary is an academic and spiritual institution. All the students reside there. They lead a semi-monastic life, sharing prayer life, study and food. Four times a day, they go to the chapel which is the very centre of the seminary life. There, professors and students begin the day at 6 a.m.; at 8 a.m. the students may also come there for a time of private meditation. At noon, there is sext and intercession, at 6 p.m. vespers, at 9.30 p.m. compline. There are courses until 4 p.m., then the students have some free time.

Some professors live with their families in the campus around the Seminary. The professors living with the students are mostly celibate priests and they share every aspect of the seminarians' life. The students take part in the life and activities of the neighbouring parishes on Sundays: they lead Sunday schools, and they preach. In this way, the students get practical experience and the parishioners benefit from their service. The Seminary has a good reputation, students come from all parts of Kerala, and from other Indian states. Thus they widen their horizon and understand the Orthodox way of life and theology.

Many of the 20 professors have doctor degrees. There are four lay people teaching languages and sociology.

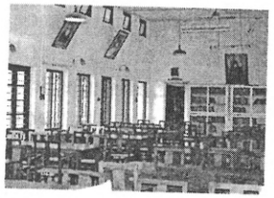
In the Seminary, deacons wear long white tunics and little flat black caps.

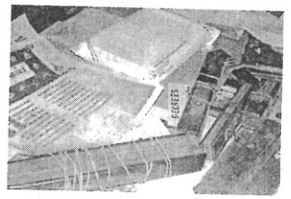
Twice a year, a full day is set apart for a retreat. On that day, silence prevails all over the place, including the meal times during which spiritual readings are made. On these days, the students spend most of the morning in the chapel praying and listening to spiritual talks. The atmosphere is then definitely like that of a monastery.

Indians love reading newspapers. Some students spend up to two hours daily reading them!

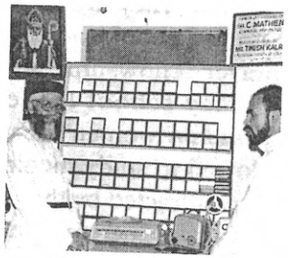
Father Cherian has been in charge of the **library** since 1973: at that time there were only 9,000 volumes, but today there are 23,000 books and 140 periodicals.

Adjacent to the library is the M.G.O.M. **Archives Centre** where the most precious papyrus and documents (on parchment and even palm leaves) are kept. These Mar Geevarghese Dionysios Memorial Archives, inaugurated in 1979, are a museum of articles of historical importance for the life of the Indian Orthodox Church.





The **M.J.D.M microfilm Library** contains 250 rolls mostly with texts in Syriac and also with ancient religious literature. It is one of the largest theological collections in India. A new building is planned to develop the library.



At the entrance of the Seminary, there is the **Sophia Centre** where seminars, retreats, classes for lay people, group discussions, family gatherings are held.

Two quarterly **periodicals** are published by the Seminary: *Star of the East*, in English, which promotes Oriental and Eastern Orthodox thinking; and *Purobitan*, in Malayalam, which is a journal for priests.

Another important contribution of the Seminary has been the **publication** of about 50 books during the last ten years, mostly for lay people. There is a set of devotional commentaries on the Old and New Testament in 15 volumes written by the Seminary professors. In 1993, a huge project for an Encyclopedia of the Church was initiated, with Metropolitan Mar Gregorios as its chief editor: it is to be a handbook on the different aspects of the life of the church, its work, wit-

ness, faith, history. Around 2,000 articles on the church, the Bible, and on religion have already been published in Malayalam.

Thus, the Seminary is an institution which, in different ways, promotes the spiritual development of the whole church and not only of the seminarians.

In the field of evangelism, the Seminary has a **lay training programme**: *Divya Bodhanam*, which is the sanscrit/malayalam word meaning "divine instruction". This **theological correspondance course** began in 1984. After the completion of a two years' course on 10 subjects (Bible, church history, ethics, theology, etc...) the students obtain a Certificate in Orthodox Christian Education. After two more years, they can obtain a Diploma in Orthodox Christian Education (DOCE). The students come from very different backgrounds and are of all ages. More than thousand people have already completed these courses. They are in leadership positions in the parishes, either as Sunday school teachers or as youth group leaders, or as organizers of prayer fellowships, etc; 40% of them are women who are mostly Sunday school leaders and members of the *Martha Mariam Samajam* women's league. At present, only deacons and priests are allowed to study theology in the Seminary, but women are more and more attracted by theology.

Father Cherian, the librarian of the Seminary, is in charge of this very interesting training programme. This is one way for the Church to teach the laity at large, and not only the clergy.

Then there is the **liturgical music school** for the training of young people in church music and choir singing. Church music is taught by Father M.P. George. The students have daily music lessons and sing in the worship services 3 times a day. This intense practice explains why they sing so well. Father M.P. George himself had a good training when he studied in the Orthodox School of Music in St. Petersburg (Leningrad). He is one of those who adapted the Syriac liturgical music to Malayalam, the language spoken in Kerala. Twenty five years ago, the prayers were still said in the original Syriac language, which today is understood only by a few scholars and by people who studied theology. So there was a great need for adaptating the language and the music, which was a difficult task as Malayalam is a nasal type of language, and Syriac a guttural one. As Father M.P. George says: "The Syriac sing from their throat, we sing from the nose; the notation of prayers is the same, but the voice production is different". Syriac music has a rich tradition: as in the Byzantine tradition there are 8 tones for 40% of the music.

Father John Mathews, who teaches New Testament in the Seminary, said that he hopes there will be more contacts with the other Orthodox churches in the future and that their students will come and share the life and hospitality of the Seminary, and that such contacts will help for a better understanding between the Indian Orthodox Church and other Orthodox churches.

Chapter VII

Life of the Monasteries

According to Joseph the Indian and to the Portuguese bishop Goes, there were monks and nuns in black habits who lived in Kerala in great poverty and chastity at the beginning of the 16th century, that is at the time when the Indians were following the East Syriac tradition and before the arrival of the West Syrian prelates. The history of the Indian Orthodox monastic life is not well-known. I was told that every bishop's house was in fact a kind of monastery and "theological school" where the bishop was at the same time the head of the community, the teacher, and the spiritual father. In 1918, the Bethany *Ashram*, which is the Indian word for monastery, was opened as such by Father P.T. Geevarghese, a scholar who wanted to revive the spiritual and monastic life of the Orthodox Church in India according to the Syriac rite and in tune with Indian culture. That is why, for instance, monks wear orange robes there. He became the bishop of the Bethany *Ashram* and was given the name of Mar Ivanios in 1925, but later he joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1930. Father Alexios, the future Bishop Theodosius (+ 1965), was one of the first monks when Mar Ivanios began the monastery, and he carried on the project of the contemplative order. But at the same time, the monks worked outside the monastery in order to serve the people.

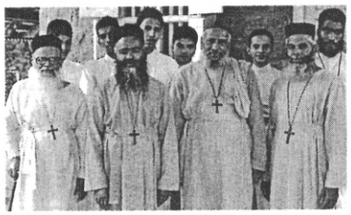
That is why all monasteries have various activities: they run schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, they sometimes have agricultural projects such as rubber tree plantations. I was told that, because of the social situation in India, monks and nuns feel called to work for the community and to assist the poor; they are expected to teach the children, to visit the sick, and to help/improve the life in the villages. But these activities do not prevent them from leading a life of prayer. In fact all monks and nuns emphasize the importance

of combining prayer and work. The Jesus Prayer is commonly used. The visiting bishop and spiritual fathers hear confession and give advice. The Bethany and Nazareth *ashrams* were more contemplative at the beginning, before the sisters began to work outside. All monks and nuns working outside the monastery give their salaries to their monasteries, as each monastery is independant financially. Every monastery has its own status, but each has a visiting bishop appointed by the Synod, who is the spiritual father of the monastery, and who is not necessarily the bishop of the diocese. The monastery chapter can propose a name for its spiritual father, but the decision lies with the Synod. Because of the needs many monks serve in parishes. Let us remember that Saint Basil himself had opened a hospital and hostel near his monastery. At present, there are monks and nuns who want to have a more contemplative life and (real) spiritual training.

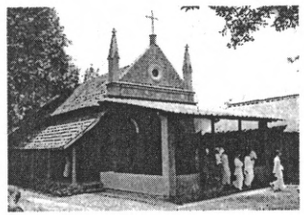
The daily life in the different monasteries and convents is generally the following: the day begins with the morning bell at 5 a.m., followed at 5.30 a.m. by morning prayers and the Holy Liturgy. Daily prayers are sung at noon, 3.30 p.m., 6 p.m. and 9 p.m., after that there is total silence until the morning. There are also times of silent meditation. Whatever their daily timetable, even when they work outside, the monks and nuns have to recite 5 times the 7 daily prayers. Breakfast is at 8 a.m., lunch at 12.30 p.m., dinner at 7 or 8 p.m. In some monasteries, there are spiritual readings during the meals. During Lent, no food is eaten before 1 p.m. Once a month, many monks and nuns keep silence for one day. The noviciate lasts at least three years. The number of monks and nuns is increasing. Today there are 15 monasteries and 10 convents with about 180 monks and 170 nuns.

Here is an account of what I heard and saw in the monasteries and convents I visited. Let us note that if *ashram* is the Indian name for monastery, *dayara* is its equivalent in Syriac.

The **Bethany Ashram** is located at Vadasserikara (Perunad), not far from Pathanamthitta, in a hilly forest area in a 100 acre plot donated by Mr E.J. John Elanjikkal. It was the first monastic institu-

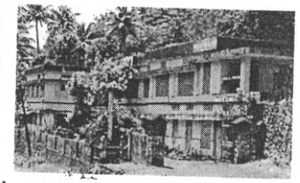


tion and has now 17 monks. The atmosphere is still very quiet. The monks observe the constitution written by Mar Theodosius, the second abbot, who is buried next to the chapel. In the morning, the monks attend to household chores. After lunch, they read or rest until the 3 p.m. prayers, after which they do manual work. In the evening, they gather and talk about issues concerning the monastery. At 9.30 p.m., they go to their cells and pray, with prostrations, acccording to the Orthodox tradition. Usually each monk chooses a priest as his confessor. Next to the monastery there are a parish church and the Bethany Hospital. Father Salomon told me : "Through prayer and meditation, Bible reading, the Holy Liturgy, confession, fasting, reciting of the Jesus Prayer, we grow in spiritual life and are in communion with God. There are many evil influences in this life. It is very difficult to explain the spiritual life of a monk. What is important is obediance and humility and prayer and the presence of God. Monks should pray all the time and remain in the monasteries, but now there is a shortage of parish priests and we have to help".

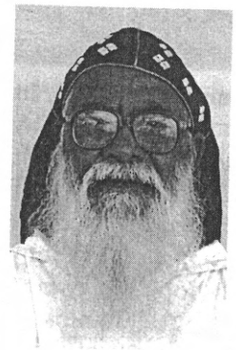


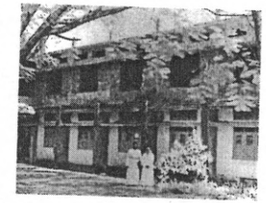
In the **Bethany Convent**, the three founding sisters were trained by the Anglican sisters of Saint Margaret in Ceylon. They began praying and doing social work such as teaching catechism and visiting the sick. In 1958, they opened the school of Bethany, now a high school where 7 sisters are teaching. Three sisters work in the Bethany Hospital. Some work in other schools, and some for the destitute, the sick, and elderly people in different places in Kerala. Even though the nuns work outside, the Bethany

Convent has the reputation of being more contemplative than others. Mother Elisabeth is the present mother superior of the 20 nuns. "We give some help, we want to do much more, especially for poor lonely people", a nun told me.



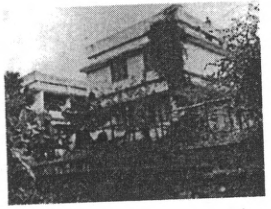
The Mount Thabor Dayara, in Pathanapuram, south of Pathanamthitta, was the second organised monastery and was founded in 1930 by Father Thomas who became Metropolitan Thomas Mar Dionysios of Niranam. It was located in a wild forest area in a Muslim neighbourhood. From the very beginning, the monks started a school, and later another school and 2 colleges were created, as well as a hospital and 4 boarding schools for boys and girls, in Kerala and in the state of Tamil Nadu. The monks also do paddi rice farming and have a coconut, vegetable and rubber plantation. Today, out of the 60 monks, about half are priests, 4 are bishops and 5 are *rambans*, that is hieromonks. Ten monks teach in the colleges and the schools run by the monastery, some are at the head of colleges and boarding schools, others serve in parishes, do social work and visit the sick. As I was told by Father Saliba K. Abraham, the monks work and pray for the community and the lay people, that is, they worship God and serve their neighbours. He said that a noviciate is under construction on a hill in Pathari and



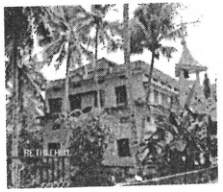


that a fully monastic contemplative life is planned for the future.

Mother Sophia was my translator in the **Mount Thabor Convent**, founded in 1925; it is situated on the other side of the monastery on the Mount Thabor compound with its large church and college and school buildings. Mother Suzanna, the founder superior, is a graduate of Madras University and was trained by the Anglican All Saints Sisters in Bombay. The founder of the monastery, Thomas Mar Dionysios, also sent two nuns to England to the Anglican Community of the Sisters of Saint Mary. Out of the 53 nuns, 10 work in schools, 6 in hospitals, 2 in boarding schools, some are teachers, in Mount Thabor and elsewhere in Kerala.

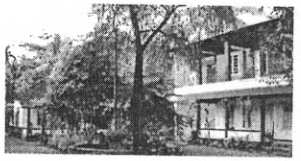


The **Monastery of Bethlehem** in Chengamanad, south of Mount Thabor Monastery, was founded in 1948 by Mar Philoxenos, bishop of Thumpamon. He was succeeded as abbot by Father E. Matthews, the present Catholicos. Another bishop also comes from this monastery, Mar Epiphanios of Quilon. There are 25 monks, 20 of them are priests, 3 are **rambans**. There are 2 novices, among them Ranji, 22 years old, who has been longing to be a monk since his childhood; he is preparing a B.A. in history, but he is living in the monastery. Like his spiritual father, K.J.Koshy, he likes simplicity and silence. Father K.J.Koshy's monastic ideal is to be away from worldly affairs and live close to God, in obediance, chastity, and poverty. The 6 acres of land are beautifully green and planted with rice fields, coconut trees, and vegetable gardens. Six monks are teachers. The monastery has 4 branches. It has a college in Kottarakara and an industrial training centre at Chengamanadu.



We went by *rickshaw* some kilometres away to **Saint Basil's Convent**, with 19 nuns, founded in 1989 by a nun from Mount Thabor, Sister Deenah, who started a home for aged women, now 12, together with the convent. She is preparing a master in philosophy in Trivandrum. The nuns do home nursing and teach tailoring in their school, they visit hospitals as well as sick and mentally ill people at home. Three times a week they have special intercessions for the sick. They organize prayer goups for women. Their confessor and spiritual father comes from the near by Bethlehem Monastery. They have regular Bible classes. Seeing the love and dedication of the young nuns for the old women who live next to the convent, I did not feel like asking any more questions.

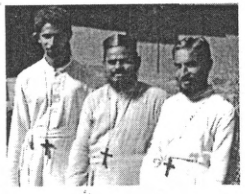
In the **Nazareth Convent** in Kadampanad, 10 kilometres from Adoor, where there are 23 nuns, I was welcomed by Sister Anama, the previous superior, the present superior being Mother Esther. The convent was started by two nuns, Maryam and Elisabeth, in 1965, on a piece of land given by Catholicos Mar Basilios Augen I. From then on the convent has been under the Catholicos. Mar Augen approved its constitution in 1966, which states, among other things, that any work must be compatible with a life of prayer and worship and that not more than half of the members of the community should be engaged in wage earning activities. Nearby, there is a lower primary school and a home for poor women. Only half of the nuns work in institutions such as the Parumala Hospital, they teach in schools, one of them is a hostel warden, 4 nuns work in a mission centre in Bilai in the North of India under Bishop Theodosius. The nuns tend a vegetable garden. Sister Anama told me that the nuns pray and work so as to live the Gospel



and for her the Jesus Prayer is a helpful prayer to be repeated as often as possible.The nuns run the Sunday school in the village.

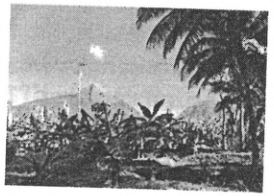
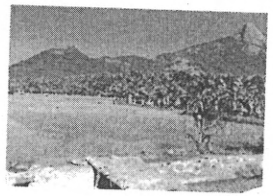
In Trivandrum, the 7 young smiling and active nuns of the **Holy Cross Convent** which is under Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Dioscoros look after 45 physically disabled orphan boys. The Holy Trinity Centre for Disabled Children provides appropriate orthopaedic and physiotherapic treatment and also surgery.

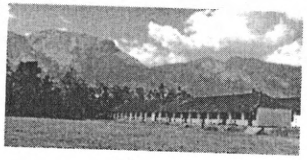
Fifteen monks live in the **Saint Paul *Ashram*** in Puthuppady near Calicut in Northern Kerala, founded in 1959 by Father M.V. George, now Bishop Mar Osthatios, on a land donated by M.C. Pothen Manamel. Some look after orphan boys, others work in the rubber plantation. One very active monk is Father K.I. Philip whom the Catholicos made *ramban* in September 1994 when I visited the monastery. After the cyclone in 1977 in Andra Pradesh, in which 50,000 people perished, Father Philip started a relief programme. Seeing the numerous lepers in the area, he decided to develop a project, which was accepted by the church, for building houses for them in the villages of Ullíngapalam and Krishnaraopeta. In 1985, he also started in Yacharam the Saint Gregorios *Balagram* house, including a dairy farm now, for the education of non Christian boys from 3 to 12 years old, so that they need not beg for their parents. These are healthy children of leprous parents, who have not been affected by the disease. Today these 105 boys learn technical skills, so as to become financally independant when they leave the place. Father Philip does not intend to baptize them. The children must first understand who Christ is, and it is up to them to take the decision to be baptized.



Father Philip is developping a similar project for girls at Pune, with the help of the sisters of Saint Paul. These institutions are assisted by the Children's Welfare Board chaired by Metropolitan Mar Osthatios.

At a walking distance from the monastery, through the palm trees and along the rice fields, you reach the **Saint Paul's Convent** where 11 sisters take care of 25 orphan girls and are active in different fields. They work hard in the kitchen, in the garden, in the rice fields, they have two cows, and they do sewing. At 10 p.m., before going to bed, they read the Bible and the mother superior comments the text. The nuns have a retreat day once a month and an annual retreat of 2 days together with the monks of Saint Paul's Monastery. Four sisters teach in Saint Paul's School, 2 work in an ophtalmological hospital, 2 in the Sultan Batary Hostel. Mother Suzanna, the superior, was a mathematics teacher until she became a nun; she accompanies the other sisters in their work. The fact that the number of orphan girls is not very high allows a family atmosphere of loving relationship in the place. When the girls are of age to leave, Mother Suzanna helps them to find a job and even a husband.



When I asked Bishop Gregorios about his views on the monastic life in his church, he said: "In the past our monks lived a solitary life; organized cenobitic life began only at the beginning of this century. Some monasteries have rules influenced by High Church Anglican orders because when the Indian Orthodox monasteries started, this was the only possibility, because they were not in touch with the Oriental Orthodox churches. At present they are trying to be more in the tradition of Saint Basil and this process is going on. There used to be a great monastic tradition in Syria, already at the time of Saint Basil. There were monks living in caves and even on columns.

Unfortunately our monastic life is too active outside. Most of our monks and nuns are teachers, nurses, etc, quite often in a separate place, where they get the income for the support of the monastery. Therefore their contemplative life is not sufficently intense. That is the weakness of our monastic life. The contemplative aspect is not yet fully developped, and so our monastic life is not sufficently deeply rooted. We hope for a new monastic life. Without a deep contemplative monastic life, our church cannot be fully Orthodox. Two of our monks visited the Coptic monasteries of Egypt in the past, others are going now to Egypt because they want to draw inspiration from Egyptian monasticism which is very alive at this stage. Very few Indian monks have had contacts with monasteries from Eastern Orthodox churches, only bishops have. How to find a balance between contemplation and action? One of the problems is the financial support needed by the monasteries which don't have any other support except the wages the monks and nuns earn".

Bishop Gregorios teaches the history of monasticism in the Seminary and he tells the students, among whom there are some future monks, about different monastic traditions in India such as Buddhist and Jain monasticism, and he points out the basic differences. He wants the young Indian monks to learn and benefit from such Indian traditions, but without imitating any particular group.

When I asked Bishop Philipos Mar Eusebios about this monasticism in India which has been much influenced by the Catholics and especially by the Anglicans, because many monks and nuns have been educated and even trained in Anglican schools and monasteries in Bengal, Ceylon and England, he answered: "A healthy balance is a must". In his diocese of Thumpamon in Pathanamthitta, Bishop Eusebios is in charge of the Convent of Saint Mary, where nuns wear *sarees*, and of the Monastery of Saint Basil. He also looks after the Christa Sishya *Ashram*, "the disciples of Christ", a monastery in the village of Tegadam near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, with 15 monks and nuns, which was the first mission centre outside Kerala. It was founded in 1936 by K.C. Varghese and by an Anglican bishop, Herbert Pakenham Walsh, who, as the principal of the Bishop's College in Calcutta, helped some young Indian Orthodox Christians in their studies; one of them was Bishop Eusebios. The ashram was ecumenical at the beginning and was later placed into the hands of

the Orthodox Church of India. It runs a school and a hospital. People come for counselling; the centre offers facilities for retreats, seminars, and camps. Bishop Eusebios often visits the *ashram* to meditate and to give guidance.

As a professor of church history and for his own spiritual benefit, Bishop Eusebios would like in the future to experience a time of solitary prayer in the Monastery of the Syrians run today by Coptic monks in the desert between Cairo and Alexandria. He concluded our discussion saying: "Christian Indian monastic communities can play an important role in witnessing to Christ in a way that will be more acceptable to Indians. Prayer and simplicity in a Christian monastic life is close to the Indian mind".

In fact, it would be an interesting experience if some Indian Orthodox monks could follow the way of the Hindu/Buddhist *sanyasi*, that is wandering monasticism, giving up all worldly things, wearing very simple clothes, living on alms, and sometimes withdrawing in lonely places. I heard about a young monk of the Bethany Ashram, Father Petros, who, after finishing his theological studies in the seminary, went and lived as a hermit in a cave in a forest for about a year. People used to visit him. On Sundays, he used to go to the nearest parish church for the liturgy. He then returned to his monastery and is now a parish priest. I also heard of *ramban* Mathew, from Saint Kuriakos Monastery in Palamoodu near Pananamthitta, who died in 1993: he lived in silence and people respected his holy life.

At present, Metropolitan Ivanios, the bishop of Kottayam, is trying to start an eastern type of monasticism in Saint Basil's Monastery near Kottayam. It is to be a missionary minded life as missionary work is important in India. He recalls that in the Oriental Church history the spreading of the Gospel was carried out by monks: many "Nestorian" monks went as missionaries from Persia to Mongolia and even to China. According to Bishop Ivanios: "Monks have to show the power of prayer and the value of faith through their lives. A life of prayer must be the basis of mission. In Saint Basil's Monastery some monks would only pray, others would be missionaries. Now there is already a small group practising the Jesus Prayer, each one in turn reciting with beads. In the monastery, we generate spiritual power for the world. Prayer is the most important experience to be lived in the monastery. There are many who can do social action, but there are

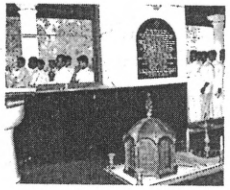
few to pray, even if in the Orthodox tradition there is no division between social action and prayer, as both are combined. But prayer transforms life into love and love is social action. Work in schools and hospitals is copied from the western Protestants and Catholics. But the eastern monastic tradition concentrates more on prayer. And lay people come to the monasteries to receive spiritual guidance".

To summarize: Indian Orthodox monks and nuns tend to follow activist Anglican and Catholic models as these were the visible examples experienced in India and they have been adapted to the Indian social situation. But some monks and nuns with whom I spoke are more and more aware of the necessity of living a traditional Orthodox ascetic monastic life in India in the future. Several wish to have contacts with Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox monasteries who would like to help them to do so. For that purpose addresses of monasteries and convents are added at the end of this book. Thus, as Bishop Irineos said, "the spiritual life of the monasteries has to be the new life of the church praying for the church and for the world".

Chapter VIII

Spiritual Fathers and Spirituality

In 1990, Dr Samuel Chandanappally, a former professor at the M.G. University Malayalam Research Centre in the Catholicate College in Pathanamthitta, published a selection of texts by the famous spiritual figures of the Malankara Church, catholicoses, bishops and a priest, under the title: "The Writings of Malankara Church Fathers". This 1,000 page book includes texts by Joseph Mar Dionysios I (+1816), the founder of the theological Seminary where he is buried in the chapel; Mar Basilios Paulos I; the Malankara Metropolitan Vattaseril Mar Dionysios, that is Mar Dionysios VI (+1934); catholicoses such as Mar Basilios Gewarghese I (+1928), Mar Basilios Gewarghese II (+1964), and Mar Basilios Augen I (+1975); Mar Basilios Mar Thoma Mathew I, the previous catholicos; two metropolitans of Thumpamon in Pathanamthitta, Mar Philoxenos and Daniel Mar Philoxenos; Mar Theodosius, the founder of Bethany Ashram and Thomas Dionysios, the founder of Mount Thabor Dayara; Petros Mar Osthatios, who started the missionary work of the Servants of the Cross and his successor, Geewarghese Mar Osthatios; Kuriakos Mar Gregorios of Pampadi, who was metropolitan of Kottayam, and his successor, Matthew Mar Ivanios (+1983); Mathew Mar Coorilos of Bethlehem Ashram, the present Catholicos, and Metropolitan Yohannan Mar Severios of the Cochin diocese; Philipos Mar Theophilos, Metropolitan of Bombay, Paulos Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Dehli, and the well-known theologian, Father V.C. Samuel, and, of course, Saint Gregorios of Parumala (+1902). These are also the great historical figures of the Indian Orthodox Church of the 20th century. There are a number of books and articles written in English by Mar Gregorios and Father Samuel.

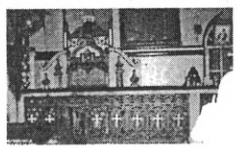


We would like to say a few words about some of these spiritual Fathers and others. Of course all the saints of the West Syrian tradi-

tion are venerated and the faithful ask for their intercession.

Two bishops were canonised in 1947 by the Malankara Orthodox Church. One of them is **Mar Gregorios**, better known as Parumala *Kochu Tirmeni*, which is the affectionate name for a holy man. He was born in the village of Mulanthuruthy near Cochin in 1848. He received his first theological training from an uncle of his who was a *malpan*, and from *malpan* Konat at Pampakuda. Before becoming a priest, he was the private secretary of the Syrian Metropolitan Yoakim Mar Ivanios in India, and later he also served Patriarch Peter III during his stay in India. In 1872, he was raised to the monastic order of *ramban* and he followed an ascetic life in Vettikal Dayara where he lived as a recluse, fasting and praying. In 1876, he was consecrated metropolitan for the diocese of Niranam; later he was also responsible for Thumpamon and Quilon. In 1877, he came to Parumala, near Tiruvala, and started a seminary; later he built a church there which was consecrated in 1895. He established various schools. He was not only a spiritual giant, but also an excellent administrator, a theologian and scholar, a prolific writer, an eminent educationist and even a missionary. He took care of people having caught smallpox. A video documentary film cassette about his life was made in Malayalam and English in 1994 by the MGOCSM.

He passed away on November 2nd 1902, which is the day of the annual pilgrimage. The faithful visit his tomb and his bedroom everyday and especially on feast days when thousands of pilgrims come, some having walked for a day or more. As said before, Saint Gregorius followed a strict ascetic life, he healed the sick, and settled bitter feuds. Today there are still miracles happening to sterile women, people with cancer and other diceases. People



come and ask for his intercession, they light candles, offer money, and write down names to be recited during the liturgy. This place is looked after by two monks.

The second Orthodox saint canonised in 1947 is Mar Basilios: he was a Syrian who came and settled in Kerala in 1685.

As for Gregorios, the first West Syrian bishop to come to India in 1665, his feast is celebrated every year on the 14th of April, the day of his death. Many other Orthodox bishops buried in different churches in Kerala are also celebrated every year on their death day. The Elanjickal family in Niranam built, next to her house, a chapel dedicated to Saint Basil and to this Syrian Bishop Gregorios who was a friend of the family. An ancestor prevented the desacralisation of his tomb in the Cheriapalli church at Parur at the end of the 18th century when Muslims destroyed some churches. The members of the family still come on his feast day to pray in the family chapel, because they consider him to be their family saint. During the year, if they have problems, they come and pray there and sometimes miracles happen.

When I asked about saintly and spiritual lay people, I was given some names, for example that of Professor Kessichako, who was a teacher and a man of prayer who inspired many people. Principal A.M. Varkey, who was the secretary of the Saint Thomas fellowship in Alwaye, was a good preacher and his sermons are published in English by the Alwaye fellowship publishing house. T.O.Mathew was a layman who spent time in the Christa Sishya Ashram which published his writtings.

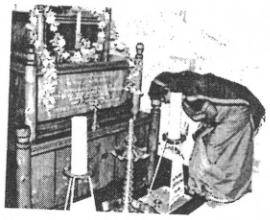
Father V.J. Joseph remembers some spiritual Fathers who had an impact on his life, like late Catholicos Mar Baselius Gevarghese II whom he served as a secretary: "When he was praying at night, I saw his face illuminated". After a serious sickness, he had been presented by his parents to the Parumala Seminary to serve God. It is said that, while celebrating the liturgy for the last time, the Virgin Mary appeared to him at night. Another holy father whom Joseph met was ramban Geevarghese Thomas who lived near Niranam; he was not a learned man, but he had the gift of foresight. He had a very simple life, he used to sleep on a mat, when fasting he only drank water, he travelled by bus or walked, he used to visit the sick and he helped so many people by his prayers. Father Joseph also remembers other men who had an impact on his spiritual life, like Metropolitan Petros

Mar Osthatios, a missionary who baptised thousands of non-Christians, as well as Mar Dionysios, the bishop of Madras, and Mar Philoxenos, the bishop of Delhi. Father Joseph believes it is important to keep the ancient spiritual tradition of the Fathers alive and to follow their example, even today, inspite of the many changes in politics and science in the modern world. For him, the spiritual roots are in the lives of the early Fathers and their followers until today.

Father Yohanna, the monk who is in charge of the church in Pampadi, spoke about **Mar Gregorios of Pampadi** whom he served as a deacon for many years. Together we visited his room where there are his bed and his liturgical ornaments, and where his books and a manuscript he copied are kept. Before becoming the bishop of Kottayam, Mar Gregorios (+1965), also called Pampadi *Tirmeni*, first lived in a hut in the forest on the hill of Pampadi near Kottayam; he used to pray there and gradually he organized the place into a monastery. He loved children. He was a great writer and his sermons were deeply spiritual. He encouraged people to pray, fast, give alms, and love their neighbours. His watch stopped at the time of his death, at 2.35 a.m. He had dug out and prepared his own tomb and used to go inside it to pray. He is buried in the church he built and many people come to ask for his blessing on the tomb which is incensed daily. On his memorial day, on April the 5th, the faithful come in crowds and make a procession.

Father K.M. George, the present vice-principal of the Seminary, also recalls his spiritual father, Mar Gregorios of Pampadi: "He was both a bishop and a great ascetic, spending most of his time praying, receiving people, blessing and counselling them. For me, he always incarnated the great compassion of God, so hospitable not only to human beings but to all kinds of creatures, including birds and animals. He really manifested the great love of God for the world. People who came to receive his blessing usually brought some presents and food which he would immediately redistribute to beggars and visitors. He used to feed a stray dog which even brought her puppies to be fed by him. Birds used to sit on his shoulders. When a thief stole things from his house and was caught and brought to him, Mar Gregorios let him

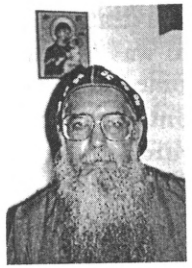
go. He welcomed people in a wonderful way, even at his death when he was semi-conscious. From his school teacher, who was a Hindu landlord and who was very fond of him, he received some forest land where he built the monastery church of Pampadi. Until today this Hindu family comes to this place to receive the blessing from Gregorios whom they appreciated greatly and whom they consider as a saint. Once there was a plague in a town, many people were dying, so Mar Gregorios travelled all the way to pray with the people and the plague stopped. Until now many people come to his tomb and some wonders happen".



As for the metropolitan of Pathanamthitta, Philipos Mar Eusebios, he had two important Orthodox spiritual fathers. One was Geewarghese Mar Philoxenios (1951), his diocesan bishop, who was his first spiritual father and who encouraged him, by his life and work, to become a minister. He opened his eyes on his own life, explained what he could do for the church and for society, and helped him to understand that he could lead a worthy life as a minister of the church. Later, a call came from above.

His second spiritual father was *ramban* M.P. Peter who became Bishop Petros Mar Osthatios, a former government school teacher, a learned man, but who liked simplicity above all. He started the "Servants of the Cross", the mission society among the outcast people and he is said to have brought more than 25,000 people to the church. "By the grace of God", says Mar Eusebios, "I am their successor and I continue their work". He mentioned other spiritual fathers like Mar Theodosius of Bethany and Mar Thomas Dionysios of Mount Thabor who were the heads of the first two Indian Orthodox monasteries, saying: "I share their visions". He then concluded : "Before the establishment of the Seminary, the system of education (*gurukula*) was to send the young boys to a theological teacher, called *malpan* in the Syrian tradition, or to the bishop; both were spiritual fathers. The teacher is he who shares his life with the students. Academic sciences are secondary, but spiritual life is essential. My students learned from my life, not only from my speeches".

In 1995, Mar Ivanios became the metropolitan of Kottayam, the centre of the Indian Orthodox Church. He studied in Oxford with



Bishop Kallistos Ware and he teaches Syriac, Greek, Hebrew, and the spirituality of the church in the Seminary. All year long, he visits his parishes to help in the spiritual education and training of the people. He teaches them the Orthodox faith and encourages them to experience Orthodox spirituality, through daily prayer, Bible reading, fasting, frequent communion, leading a good life, so that the Holy Spirit may dwell in them and transform them to become enlightened men and women and real Christians: "Our main mission is not to go to Heaven but to bring Heaven on earth, as is said in the prayer 'Our Father'. When we obey God, we create heaven, otherwise we create hell". I asked him: "How can we obey God's will?" Metropolitan Ivanios answered: "You have to be in touch with God, to pray and to control yourself, in order to receive God's grace and to do good and to be able to discern good from evil, to resist evil and become a mature Christian. It is not an easy way, it implies a constant spiritual training and discipline. When we obey God, the Holy Spirit is in us and we receive the strength and light of discernement. For the presence of the Holy Spirit to work in us, we need daily prayer. The Orthodox church teaches us the spirituality of daily life, not an emotional spirituality, but a transforming one, which makes people become good and pray for their enemies, this is the sign that the Holy Spirit is working within people. This is what Christ taught us, a new philosophy of life, so as to create peace, to love our enemies. Orthodox prayers are for acquiring a pure and holy life. The answer is not in the gift of the Spirit but in the fruits of the Spirit which are love, patience, suffering, struggling. Prayer and contemplation are great actions needed for the world. Prayer is an action, it transforms the sinful person and the world". Speaking of spiritual fatherhood, Mar Ivanios told me that his first spiritual counsellor was a spiritual mother, his own aunt. She was a devoted married woman, the mother of nine children, and she taught him the power of prayer and fasting. This converted him back to the Orthodox Church when he was sixteen, as his family had joined the Protestant Mar Thoma Church. According to Bishop Ivanios, the pressure of missionaries in India made it difficult to keep the ancient tradition. That is why he wants to revive Orthodox traditions and spirituality and explain to

the people the Orthodox theology found in the liturgy and in iconography and to make Orthodoxy alive in the modern world.

When I asked him: "How do you live Orthodox spirituality in India?", Bishop Mar Gregorios answered: "I do not know what "spirituality" means, it is not an Orthodox word. Westerners have invented it as they have done with dogmatic tradition and theology, moral and spiritual theology. This distinction does not exist in the Orthodox tradition. For us, spirituality includes dogma and moral theology. The Westerners are intellectual and activist and they bring something more into it called spirituality. For us the centre of spirituality is the Eucharist and there are many other aspects of spirituality like daily prayer and fasting.

A saint of today, Mar Gregorios bishop of Parumala, healed people while he was alive and he continues to do so. Other bishops who are not canonized but whom people regard very highly also had the power of healing. For instance Mar Gregorios of Pampadi was a simple and God fearing man, praying all the time. Wherever he went people sought his blessing because of his glowing spiritual energy and yet he was a very modest person, almost like a poor beggar. This man really inspired me. Also one of the previous Catholicoses, Basilios Gewarghese II, who consecrated me as a deacon, was a man of prayer and of great spirituality. He was a saintly man. When he stood at the altar he radiated such a sense of the presence of God that everybody could feel that his prayers were really addressed to God that he was seing before him. He also blessed and healed many people, including Hindus".

I also interviewed H.H. the Catholicos Baselios Mar Thomas Mathews II about spiritual life and about the spiritual advice he gives to people and he answered: " I don't like to say that I am the head of the church, I am the minister of all people in the church and I am supposed to be the spiritual father of the church. Spirituality is a life conducted by the Holy Spirit. We believe that we are guided by the Holy Spirit, like Saint James who said: " It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and our decision" (Acts 15/28).

As for spiritual advice, I tell the people that Jesus Christ came and lived with us and that the Holy Spirit can work within us. That is a fundamental tenet which should be proclamed to all people. Jesus Christ who is beyond time and space gave the Holy Spirit to guide

the church. So we must always do everything being guided by the Holy Spirit. You and I must be persons guided by the Holy Spirit. You must also observe all the canons of which, for me, the Bible is the main one. You must eat your Bible, you must be a person saturated by the Bible and follow a biblical life. I use to read at least six Bible chapters a day. A spiritual person cannot avoid reading the Holy Bible. Read the Holy Bible and try to translate it into your life. See the spiritual visions of the Bible, the teachings of Jesus Christ, the writings of the Apostles and of the Prophets. They must penetrate your mind, your heart, and you must be saturated.

The liturgy is the reproduction of the spiritual life, of the essence of the Holy Spirit. People may ask: who wrote these liturgical poems? The Holy Spirit ! You cannot separate prayer, thanksgiving from liturgy, it is total life for God, for God, for God. That is the great offering of yourself completely to Our Lord Jesus Christ. I desire only one thing: What am I bound to do to offer myself to God? To pray, to thank God. The rest belongs to God. I don't worry for myself as God takes care of me. There are many problems to face, but in Christian life there is no risk as Christ is with you, so you go ahead. Are you afraid ? Are you Christian ?

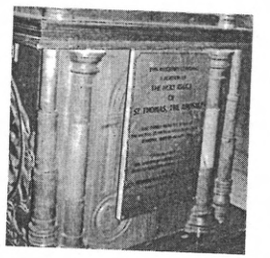
Once a child knelt in front of his mother before leaving home for higher studies and asked her for a word. The mother answered: 'My son, I am illiterate, I don't know all the things you know, but don't do anything that your mother would be ashamed of, that is anything that God would be ashamed of'.

Concerning spiritual life, we always advise our people to read the Bible and to conform to the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, to have faith and practice and to follow the teachings of the church, of the spiritual fathers, of the canons. The church is there to teach, the Bible to prove. So we must observe and practice, then each person will be a spiritual person. If you have Jesus Christ, if you are guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit, you have everything. So your life must be graceful, graceful, graceful."

Speaking of spiritual fathers in India, one should not forget the first one, **Saint Thomas the Apostle**, Father K.M. George said : "Thomas is sometimes called the "doubting" one in the West, but he is the one who made an important confession of faith in Christ when he said: 'My Lord and my God'. Saint Thomas was looking for proof,

for a concrete experience of Christ by touching Him, by asking for evidence. Saint Thomas as a member of the Apostolic college has transmitted to us the authority of the Apostolic tradition. He was the disciple of Christ. So we have a very close relationship with early Christianity".

According to tradition, Saint Thomas was buried in Mylapore near Madras, where miracles took place. The day of his martyrdom is celebrated on December 21st. Concerning the relics of Saint Thomas, the early Syrian tradition speaks of their transfer around 165 to Edessa where Saint Ephrem (4th century) is said to have venerated them. In Syria, Saint Thomas's day is on July 3rd, which is the date when his relics are said to have been brought back. But many believers still go to Mylapore which has remained a place of pilgrimage.



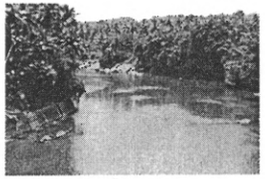
In 1965, the Indian Orthodox Catholicos Augen I visited Syria and he received some relics of Saint Thomas from the Metropolitan of Mosøul, Mar Severios Sakka, the present Syrian Patriarch. The church of Edessa having been destroyed in 1142, parts of the relics were found in a church dedicated to Saint Thomas in Mosøul in Irak. So, some of these relics as well as a part of the *sunoro* or belt of the Virgin were brougt to India. Today relics of the Apostle are venerated by the faithful in the church of the Catholicosate in Devalokam in Kottayam, as well as in the 13th century church of Mulanthuruthi, under the Syrian patriarchate. In 1972, big celebrations were organized in India to commemorate the martyrdom of Saint Thomas. Let us remember that, when Marco Polo arrived in Mylapore in 1292, he noted that some native Christians took some earth from the place of martyrdom to heal sick people; he himself took some back to Venice which also healed people. Some relics of Saint Thomas are said to be kept in Patmos and in Georgia.

Chapter IX

Daily social life and liturgical life

In this chapter, some parts of which can be read in connection with the chapter "inculturation", I shall speak of the daily social and family life, including the liturgical life.

What was the traditional Kerala daily life like? In the western part of Kerala, country boats were used for transportation: before the roads were built, people used to go to the seminary by boat. Today you still see barges carrying soil or wood. You can still use public boat transport on broad canals. Sometimes, in the villages, people bathe and wash clothes in the canals.

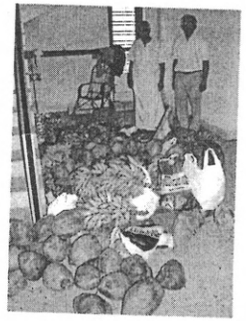


For celebrations, like that of the *Onam* festival, each September in Kerala, Christians and Hindus together symbolically recall the time of prosperity of King Mahabali. On that occasion, there are theatre plays, flower decorations on the entrance grounds, special food, and very popular boat races on rivers.

Brass lamps play an important role in churches and homes. In the past, each home had a brass lamp which was lit every day for prayers and, on festivals, the senior lady of the house would bring out a lighted lamp. As in Hindu festivals, church processions in the streets, including wedding processions in the past, were accompanied by musical instruments, with ornamental umbrellas. At the consecration of two *rambans* in

Puthupaddi, I saw a very colourful procession going from the church of the nearby village to the school ground where church and even government dignitaries and a crowd of people gathered to celebrate the two monks. There were colourful umbrellas, a band was playing, and crackers exploded. The road was decorated with twisted strips of palm leaves fixed to ropes. Food was prepared and offered to all visitors in the monastery, on banana leaves in the Indian village style.

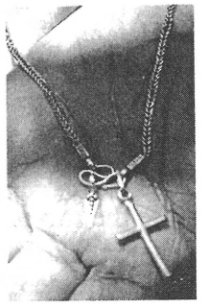
As church offerings, the faithful bring some of the harvest, like coconuts, sugarcane, bananas, and also chickens to be sold at auction, especially on feast days.



All church ceremonies, such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, use the West Syrian Orthodox traditional prayers and rites. But the Orthodox Church of Syrian tradition in India has assimilated some Hindu customs connected with birth, marriage, and death. For instance, the newborn child is given three drops of honey that have touched gold to ensure future prosperity.

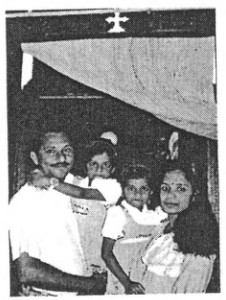
As is the custom in India, marriages are generally arranged by the families, with the consent of the boy and girl. The wife and children adopt the church denomination of the

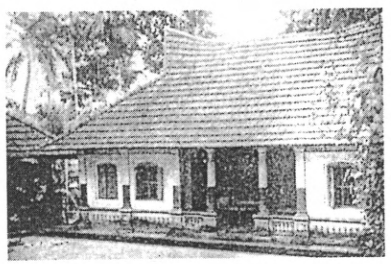
husband. The girl's parents used to give a dowry, which could create difficult problems for poor families. Now it is legally forbidden. In Hindu and Christian marriages, the bridegroom ties around the neck of the bride a *thali* or *minnu*, which is a pear shaped golden ornament, but Christians give it the shape of a cross made of tiny beads. She is also given other jewels. During the wedding ceremony, the bride is presented with a new saree cloth, *mantrakodi*, put on her head.



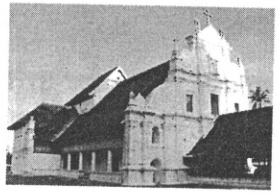
I attended the burial of the father of a bishop in a village church. In the middle of the crowded church, the body was exposed, facing the East, covered with a white linen cloth, except for the face, with flowers and a cross, and surrounded with candles. The widow stood beside the body, in a white saree. Prayers were then said during 40 days. (For a sociological approach and details on marriage, birth and death, see : Susan Visvanathan, *The Christians of Kerala, History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993, p.102-151).

Ancient Syrian churches and traditional houses were made of wood and some of the beams were decorated with wooden carvings, often crosses. Some houses have "pagoda" shaped roofs in the Kerala style. Like the Hindu temples, the old churches stand in a large square churchyard surrounded with walls, with priests' and parish rooms on one side. A large granite cross often stands close by. In the ancient church of Cheriyapalli in Kottayam, you can still see some wooden carvings and paintings, and in the court walls there are hollows into which oil is poured and lit for festivals. Under a roof adjacent to some ancient

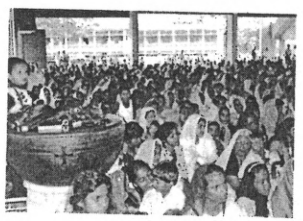




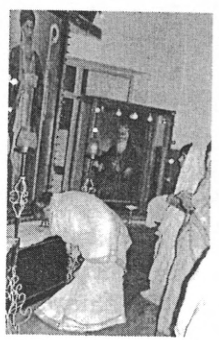
churches, there is sometimes the *nadakashala*, a place for biblical theatre performances.



Inside the church, the altar area, facing the east, is always three or four steps higher than the area where the faithful stand. There is no wooden screen or *iconostasis*, but a curtain separates the altar, as in the Syrian, Armenian, and Ethiopian churches, which is drawn during the solemn moments of the liturgy. In some churches, there are bishops' tombs. In the middle of the church there is sometimes a *bema*, a kind of raised platform for reading the Bible and for preaching, and for celebrations on feast days; there is also a very characteristic brass oil lamp, the *nilavilaku*, which either stands on the floor or hangs from the ceiling.

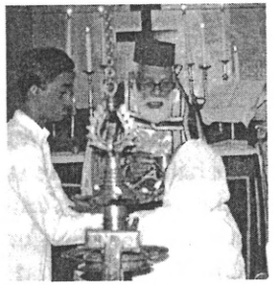


The faithful offer the coconut oil needed to light it and, whenever they enter the church, they anoint from it, dipping one finger into it and crossing themselves on the foreheads. The baptismal font is inside the church. People take off their shoes or sandals before entering a church, as in Hindu temples and holy places. Usually men stand on the left side and women on the right side of the church, while the children stand in front near the altar. At times people sit on the floor on mats. Women cover their heads with their half-sarees (*kavanis*). During prayers in front of the relics, the faithful make full prostrations (*metanias*) to the ground, especially during Lent. They venerate pictures. Processions in or around



the churches for Christian feasts are made with crosses, candles, censers and colourful umbrellas.

Everything in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India, dogma, liturgy, *anaphoras* and prayers, patristics, mariology, hagiography, comes from the West Syrian tradition of Antioch. The main *anaphora* is that of Saint James, the first bishop of Jerusalem. Saints like Ignatios, Cyril, and Mar Severios are commemorated as well as monks like Mar Ephrem and Mar Simon the Stylite. The yearly feasts, prayers, and the form of the liturgy are very similar to those of the Eastern Orthodox Church, so are other rites, including prayers for the sick, blessing of a home, consecration of sacred vessels and clothes, confession, fasting, and the ordination of the clergy. (See descriptions in the chapter "Christian calendar ritual" in Susan Visvanathan, *The Christians of Kerala, History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993). Nowadays, the liturgy is sung in Malayalam, the vernacular language of Kerala, as well as in Hindi, Tamil, and in English elsewhere, and very rarely in Syriac as it used to be for centuries. At present it is emphasized that people should worship in their own language. The whole congregation sings the responses to the priest and the deacon. Before the Holy Liturgy, or *Qurbana*, which is the Syriac word for offering/sacrifice, there is the preparation, or *tuyobo*. The public celebration includes the *Trisagion*, the readings from the Epistle and from the Gospel and the Nicean Creed. Then comes the old Christian custom of the kiss of peace for reconciliation: after having kissed and touched the priest's hands, the deacon comes down from the altar to touch the people's hands, then each one does the same with his or her neighbours. Two *marbah'tho*, or metal fans on long handles, with figures of angels and little bells are shaken at the most solemn moments of the liturgy, so as to remind the congregation of the angels' presence. Incense and candles are used regularly. After the consecration of the leaven bread and wine, there are prayers of intercession and some litanies include the blessing of the *paddy* rice fields. The Lord's Prayer is said before the communion, after which the faithful drink a little water. Then people line up in front of the priest to be



blessed by his cross and they put their alms in the offertory box.

During the liturgy, some Greek words can be heard like *Evangelion* (good news), *stomen kalos* (let us stand upright), *kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy); and also Syriac words like *kadisho* (saint), *barekmore* (bless, O Lord), *barekou kadesh* (bless and sanctify). The priests wear white cassocks with square collars in the back and round black caps and inside the church they wear black robes. Bishops wear black or pink vestments and black hats and they have very colourful ornaments for liturgical prayers in the church, except at Lent time.

What about the Indian Orthodox practice of daily prayer? In the past, even lay people used to pray with their families seven times a day, or at least three times. Today people live in a modern industrial world which is very different from the traditional rural life, but Orthodox Christians usually gather twice a day for prayers, in the morning and in the evening. Indian Orthodox Christians use to fast, especially during Great Lent. They venerate pictures. In Orthodox homes, you can see pictures of Christ, of the Virgin, of saints and, of course, the cross. The last stage in life for a married religious Hindu man was to retire from the world and to lead a life of meditation, a very simple life only before God or even, in some cases, to renounce the world completely and wander as a pilgrim (*sanyasi*). Formerly, some male Indian Orthodox Christians of the Syriac tradition used to follow this custom, which was also quite common amongst Oriental Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia.

After some Indian Orthodox Christians settled outside Kerala in other parts of India, in big industrial centres, four dioceses were set up in Bombay, Madras, New Delhi, and Calcutta. Especially since the 1960s, there has been quite a large diaspora of Indian Orthodox Christians around the world, especially in the Gulf countries (Abu Dabi, Bahrain, Dubai, Muscat and Doha, Kuweit, Saudi Arabia), and also in America, in Europe (United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Switzerland) and in Asia (Malaysia, Singapore), Australia and Africa.

There is a continuous development of parishes in these various countries. In many families, at least one member goes abroad to make a living so as to be able to help the family in India and to build large new houses when coming back home.

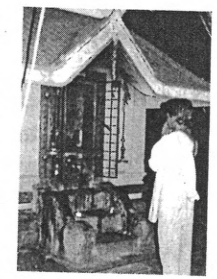
Chapter X

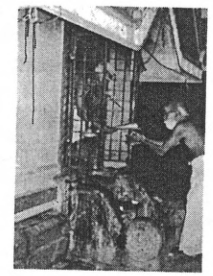
Inculturation

As we have seen before, some Hindu customs have been adopted by Indian Christians, such as lighting lamps or putting on the ***minnu*** and ***mantrakodi*** for marriage. Could other customs be adapted, such as Indian clothes, Indian music ?

There is an unofficial inter-religious dialogue in India whose leaders are Bishops Mar Gregorios and Mar Osthatios, Father Jacob Kurian and Father K.M. George. What are their views on inculturation ?

Father Cherian said: "The Indian Orthodox Church is yet to be developped, we still have to grow as a Christian Indian community. We have a type of Orthodoxy that came from the Syrian tradition. Without cutting our roots and traditions, we want to build our Christian life adapted to the Indian situation. We must get to know the mind of India, of Indian religions, study them, to know about Hindu faith and how to share Christian faith with them. We need to have more communication with them and we must know the way in which we can adjust. I don't mean pluralism. We have the responsabilty of showing other Indians what christianity is by ways they can understand. We must be able to share our Christian values with our non Christian brothers whilst keeping our spiritual richness. We must understand the minds of the people of the country, so as to be in tune with the Indian culture, folklore, church architecture and art. We must proclaim the unknown God and make him known, as Saint Paul proclaimed Christ to the





Corinthians. By true dialogue, we can communicate what we believe. More important than the theological expression is participating in the people's life, having common festivals such as at the time of *Onam* in September in Kerala which is a commemoration, celebrated by Hindus, Muslims and Christians, of the reign of a legendary king when all people were well treated in an equal way. Festivals like Christmas and the saints' feasts are also celebrated in the Hindu style with elephants, garlands, Indian drums, as in my native place in Kunnamgulam, and everybody participates. The same will happen for a Hindu festival. In the parish of Nadakashala there is a stage for drama, or margamkali, which are songs that accompany a dance depicting the preaching of Saint Thomas in India and the foundation of the Malabar/Malankara Church and which also relates Gospel stories. *Margam* means the way, so Saint Thomas came to India and showed the way to Christ. But, unfortunately, this Christian symbolic art form has been destroyed in Kerala.

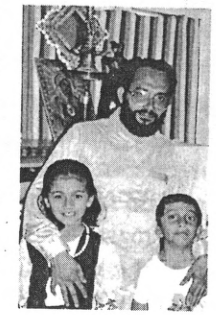
Father V.C. Samuel wrote: "The Malankara Orthodox Church should conserve the real values of the Eastern Christian heritage which it has received from the Syrian and other sources, and should seek to relate them to its life in the Indian context" (in *Truth triumphs*, p. VI). How can we understand and experience that?

When I asked Bishop Gregorios about inculturation and what was specifically Indian in his church, he said: "It is very difficult to answer this question. We are Indians and the Indian character and mind set are very present in our church; but we cannot say consciously that we have adopted something from the Indians. We are children of the soil of this country and, unlike some Roman Catholics or Protestants, we have to make a conscious effort to indianize. We are part of the Indian system. We don't consciously try to imitate anything the Hindus do. Some decades ago, our women used to wear specific Christian white clothes, not sarees, and you could then recognize the Christians in the street". Bishop Gregorios remembers that his mother had a special white dress going down to the ankles which she wore for receiving communion in church and all women did the same. In 1994, I still saw some elderly

Orthodox women in Kerala wearing white clothes for receiving communion or at a burial. Today you can only recognize the Christians by their names.

As to the experience of inculturation made by some Catholic priests like Father Lesaux and Father Griffith, Bishop Gregorios respects them but he does not believe that this is of great relevance, as it is part of the interest shown by some Westerners who have tried to become part of the East. But in India, such experiences were not received with great interest and Orthodox Christians don't think this is the right way. They can understand the spirit behind it, but this artificial external indianization is suspect to Indians.

In 1984, the Catholicos inaugurated the New Delhi Orthodox Centre whose objectives are to explore the cultural, religious, and spiritual legacy of the people of India, to promote a dialogue between the major religions of India, to develop cultural creativity and to deepen and communicate the heritage of the Orthodox Christians of India. The Orthodox Church of India has no official dialogue with Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Jains, but Bishop Gregorios is well accepted by them. He was asked by Jains to write a book about Jainism, he also lectures on Buddhism in Buddhist centres. He has studied their different traditions in depth and appreciates what is good in them. Hindu holy men come to lecture at the Seminary where yoga classes are taught as part of the spiritual discipline. Bishop Gregorios told me: "Yoga is very good for the concentration of the mind and for the control of the body. It does not need to be linked to Hindu metaphysical notions. It can be used in the same way as the Mount Athos tradition of breathing, taking the sitting posture and looking down at the navel while practising the Prayer of the Heart". Bishop Gregorios added that if your life is good, Indians of other religions will respect you.



Father Jacob Kurian teaches theology in the Seminary as well as major religions, especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. For him, in the Indian Orthodox tradition, there is the unique combination, on the one hand of the Syriac heritage and on the other of the Indian patrimony: "We should feel that we have an Indian role to play and we should present to the world a specific picture

of our church. We cherish so much the Indian Orthodox Christian tradition that we could build our Christian tradition on the foundations of the *sanathana* (universal law, cosmic order), that is the ancient Hindu *samskara* (ritual) Hindu life style. Of course, there is the foundation laid by Christ and the Apostles and the long spiritual tradition of Christianity. But the theological tradition of the Indian church has to be in line with the Indian philosophical tradition, which is not necessarily only the Hindu one, but also that of the Buddhists, the Jains and other non-Christian traditions which also contribute to the Indian philosophical tradition. So we have to take this into consideration together with the Eastern Orthodox spirituality and theology. We want to present to the world a model of Christianity that has lived for the last 20 centuries in a tradition of pluralism, but at the same time we want to keep the central elements of Orthodox Christian spirituality and doctrinal integrity. "Without attachment", "without desire" are expressions of the Far East which correspond to what the Church Fathers call "without passion". Christ is not only the God of Christians. Christ is for all men and for creation, He is Emmanuel, God with us, a God who gives new life when you die: can any person deny such a God? When Christians adopt this attitude of *sanathana dharma* (cosmic universal law) which incorporates all truth, they will be able to overcome all anxiety regarding syncretism. This attitude, more than just the study of the Desert Fathers, can bring people to an awareness of God. Truth wherever belongs to Christ".

When I asked Bishop Mar Ivanios what the Orthodox Christians can adopt from Hindu spirituality without compromising their faith, since both the Hindu and the Orthodox ideal is to live without any dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, and to find a balance between action and contemplation, he said: "For Hindus, the soul is good and goes to heaven/God, but the body is evil and goes back to earth through reincarnation. But Christians believe in the resurrection of the body, so they don't cremate it, as Hindus do. But today even Hindus have started to bury instead of cremating. Similarities can be found in the life and fasting discipline of Hindu *gurus* (spiritual master) and Christian Orthodox spiritual fathers. But Hindus say that the risen Christ is a *sadguru*, that is the only true *guru*, and on the other hand Christians say that He is God. So for Hindus there is

no difference between the soul/personal self and the deity/Godhead (*Brahman*): they are one. Hinduism identifies the essence of the soul to the Supreme Principal, or God, or *Brahman*. When Christians are purified, they never enter 'into' God. According to Orthodox 'deification' theology, they 'become' God through God's energies, not in essence, and that is the difference with Hinduism. Hindus pray simply and repeat the name of God. The name of God is different for Christians, but the expression of prayer is the same. So there are some similarities, but they should not be confused. We Indian Orthodox Christians have to be faithful to our tradition. For some Christians, *yoga* is only a physical exercice not be used for spiritual purposes. Some Indian Orthodox think that the *yoga* position, which consists in sitting on the floor with folded legs, could be used for recitating the Jesus Prayer. As concerns clothes, there is no difficulty for Orthodox monks to wear Indian clothes. As for music, it could be adapted gradually. As some people told me, everything does not have to be Indian, but what is good in Indian tradition and is acceptable for Christian Orthodox, can be borrowed".

When I asked Father K.M. George how to be fully Indian and fully Orthodox, he answered: "The spirituality of the Indian people in general has helped us in developing our Christian spiritual ethical *ethos*. Of course we make a fundamental distinction between our faith and that of other religions. What other Orthodox Churches have not understood is that Asian religions can be very sympathetic to any genuine form of Eastern Christianity. There are points of contact with Orthodox Christianity, like apophatic theology and ascetic monasticism. Indian Orthodox Christians also respect their neighbours' spiritual religious life. Indian spirituality adopts a simple life style. It believes first of all in disciplining one's body, mind and soul. There are different spiritual techniques like meditation and breathing exercices which help to develop the body, mind and soul. When you compare these with the ascetic practices of Orthodox monasticism in Mount Athos or in Egypt, you can see similarities, even if the religious content is different. But it shows some common grounds of spirituality. In a country like India where there are different religions, people are generally open to other points of view".

When I asked how far Indian Orthodox Christians can go in inculturation, Father George answered : "There are some acceptable forms

of Asian spirituality that Orthodox can understand very well. For us there is an ongoing interreligious dialogue in our daily life and people can well accept each other without compromising. There is no specific need for inculturation in the liturgy, as the Orthodox liturgy is already Oriental in character and spirit and changing radically the liturgy is not acceptable. But some degree of creativity will be desirable. Let us mention, for instance, that the same lamps are used in Hindu and Christian homes for worship and prayers: regarding light, Hindus speak of it in a more general way and not in reference to Christ as the source of light. Inculturation should be reflected upon, but without great urgency. It is more important for Indian Orthodox Christians to discover more deeply their own tradition of the Church Fathers and of the essence of monastic tradition, for instance spiritual fatherhood and motherhood. As for Hindus, they may not appreciate some forms of inculturation in Christianity as they may think it is a new way of proselitizing".

The liturgical vestments can be of any pleasing colour. Traditional Indian instruments, like *tabla* and *cythar*, are sometimes used. Father M.P. George, who teaches Syrian Orthodox music in the Seminary, also sings *ragas*, the traditional Indian religious music. Some Indian Christians intend to write Christian hymns which could be sung with *raga* tunes, in order to be more Christian and Indian at the same time.

So the question of how to reinterpret the traditional Hindu heritage in appropriate terms for contemporary Oriental Orthodox Christian Indians in life style, customs, symbols, and dress, remains open.

Conclusion

It is important to underline once more that Christianity in South India and Kerala was not "imported" by the European colonisers and missionaries, as many people believe, but is an indigenous reality that has existed since the Apostolic age, even before churches were founded in the West. These Indian Christians have amazingly maintained and faithfully witnessed the Apostolic faith and at the same time have followed an Indian style of life, with a deep sense of identity, and they are now adapting to the modern world. Indian Christians have been an integral part of the local society since the time of Saint Thomas. This challenge of identity was, as Father V.C.Samuel wrote ("Our Church in History", *Star of the East*, vol.5, no 4, December 1983, p.28), "to evolve a form a Christianity which is genuinely authentic and at the same time Indian and indigenous". This is the great question of inculturation put to all Orthodox churches around the world and to which the Orthodox churches have answered, in the course of time, in Russia, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, and elsewhere.

The development of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India is remarkable in its organisation, its administration, theology, pedagogy, and social work and it has many projects. One of them is quite original : Bishop Geevarghese Mar Coorilos of Bombay wants to build in Badelapur, on the way to Poona, on a 45 acre site, an Indian Orthodox village, with schools and educational institutions. In the social field, there are plans for a hospital, homes for old people, orphans, disabled persons, street children, terminally ill patients, drug and alcohool addicts. It will be a religious and spiritual centre with worship services and retreats, a conference centre with accomodation, open to all. Counselling will be provided and youth will have a place to meet. For silent meditation, there will be a special place in the village, as well as small huts in the outskirts. Flowers and vegetables will be planted and sold for income.

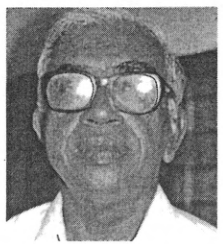
For projects of all kinds, the different church organisations cooperate and help each other. Monks and nuns do social work together

with priests, lay people, and youth. No barriers! Everybody is aware of the social needs of the people in a country like India. *Diakonia* or the social engagement of the church in the world is a must.

There is a renewal of a strictly ascetic monastic life. Who then will serve the people in the world ? When I asked Bishop Mar Gregorios about the possibility of a feminine diaconate in India in the future, similar to that of the sister Coptic church in Egypt, he answered that the Synod had asked him to study what other Orthodox churches are doing and he believes that Indian Orthodox bishops would not object. In the Malankara Orthodox Church, social action and spiritual life are interrelated and they both respond to the daily needs of the world.

Mission must first of all be understood as the most important Christian witness, that is the manifestation of the love of Christ in one's life. As Mr George Verghese, the Saint Elias Sunday School teacher of 250 children, a previous bank clerk who has always been active in church life, told me: "In the Sunday school classes we explain how to follow Christ the loving Saviour and how to give one's life for the church. We emphasize that the first commandment is to love one another, because we Christians are á minority in Kerala and in India". It must be stressed that this missionary fervor is respectful of the people and has nothing in common with "forced" conversions by foreign missionaries. Social assistance, education in schools and colleges run by the church are offered to Christians and non Christians (Hindus, Muslims) alike without any proselitizing, which is important, especially when dealing with orphans.

As Bishop Eusebios learnt as a young man, one must spiritually understand how to serve the church and society, which can never be separated, in order to bring God's creatures back to Him. There is a deep awareness that there is no difference in doing something for the church and at the same time for society. I understood this better when Jyothi Suzanne Abraham, the daughter of Mr Abraham Thalavady, a youth leader, told me that in Indian culture, it is important for both Hindus and Christians to fulfill one's duties towards one's family and society; and that this "responsibility" (*dharma* in Hindu vocabulary) comes first as a service to God.

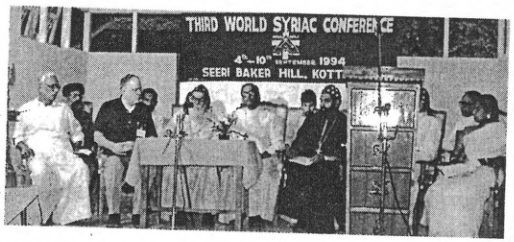


Hindu Indians would say: "Do your work (*karma*) and fruits (*phala*) will follow". Mr A.M. Matthew himself, a very kind and busy retired government civil engineer who lives a simple devoted life and is very charitable to everyone and who helps in the church, told me: "By being efficient, honest and hard working I believe I do God's work".

As Father K.C. Joseph wrote in 1977 : "The Orthodox system of Church government is based on what may be called 'the mind of the community'... In the Church the bishops have an honoured place because they are the custodians of sacramental grace... The clergy are the instruments through whom sacramental grace is conveyed to all members of the Church... The laity are, in fact, the Church in its relation to the world, and on the laity will depend the impact of the Church on the world" (quoted by D. Daniel p. 331).

In Parumala, there is a guest house and a big auditorium where the Malankara Association, the supreme body of the church which includes clergy and laity, meets every five years to elect the Catholicos, bishops, the lay leaders, the trustees, and to amend the Constitution. It is impressive to think of such an important church event being held in a place where the spirit of Saint Gregorius is omnipresent. It again shows the link between the life of the church and its spiritual dimension. As H. H. the Catholicos emphasized: "Life is full of grace, that is full of the Holy Spirit".

Even though the East Syrian dialect and traditions were replaced by the West Syrian language of the Church of Antioch from the 17th century on, it was still the Syriac language that continued to be the source language of the Indian Orthodox. Though today Malayalam is the normal liturgical language, it is important to preserve the knowledge and practice of Syriac, which is taught in the Seminary, but which should not be limited to scholars, as it is the basis of the liturgical and patristic tradition. Keeping the Syriac roots is also the aim of the Syro Malabar Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI) in Kottayam, which organizes courses and ecumenical conferences. The preservation of the Syriac language is of great



urgency, as the Indian Orthodox diaspora in the world and even in India outside Kerala more and more tend to use English and other languages for their liturgical and daily life, and many of these young Indian Orthodox people don't know Malayalam any longer.

In order to increase contacts among the Oriental Orthodox Churches which live far away from each other, Emperor Haile Selassie organized a Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches church leaders in Addis Abeba in 1965, which the Indian Catholicos Mar Augen I attended.

As concerns ecumenism in general, the Indian Orthodox Church has relationships with the different churches in India. The church was a founding member of the World Council of Churches in 1948.

I believe that the followers of the main religions of Asia, namely Buddhism and Hinduism, can understand and be interested in the Orthodox existential and mystical approach of Christianity, with its spirituality linked to life. In the perspective of unity between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, the dialogue with non-Christians in Asia should be taken into consideration. The Indian Orthodox are already active in this field.

Oriental Orthodox Churches, such as the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India, and the Eastern Orthodox Churches share the same ecclesiology, that is a similar way of understanding and living in the Church. Their liturgical prayers and rites are also very similar. Concerning faith, it was only on the christological level that a misunderstanding in terminology existed and this has been lifted by the best theologians on both sides, as explained in the introduction. So what do Indian Orthodox Christians think of a future unity between the two families, the Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox Churches ?

Indian Orthodox theologians, like Bishop Mar Gregorios, Father V.C. Samuel, and Father K.M. George Kondothra, have been conducting the non-official and official theological discussions. Father George Kondothra thinks it only needs one step to complete union and that the Holy Synod, the priests, and the people in India would agree. Father V.C. Samuel foresees unity in the near future. He thinks that people should do their best to remove the misunderstandings on both sides, as the time is ripe for Oriental and Eastern Orthodox to unite and to play a role in the union of Christianity to which God has

called us. Orthodox people should work together, pray together, live together, in order that unity may become a reality in the life of the church, the clergy, and the people. If the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox come together, this will be a great step towards Christian unity. As for Bishop Mar Gregorios, he hopes that soon the two families of churches will be in communion since they have the same faith. Contacts must now be established at all levels: hierarchy, clergy, laity, and monastic institutions. His Grace Catholicos Mathews II told me that the faith of his church is the same as that of the Eastern Orthodox and that he hopes and prays that in the very near future, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, there can be full understanding.

Different visits of Eastern Orthodox prelates to India contributed to a better mutual knowledge. The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church has had a very friendly relationship with Eastern Orthodox Churches, especially with the Russian and Romanian churches, and welcomed their delegates on different occasions. For instance, after the WCC General Assembly in New Dehli in 1961, representatives of the Russian, Greek, Romanian churches, and even Patriarch Athenagoras, the ecumenical patriarch, paid a visit to the Indian Orthodox Church. In 1962, there was a visit of Archbishop Macarios of Cyprus and in 1977 of Patriarch Pimen of Russia. For the celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the Malankara Catholicate in 1982, representatives of Constantinople, Russia, Romania, Georgia, Bulgaria, and Finland attended the ceremonies. At the Pan-Orthodox Conference at Rhodes in 1960, two Indian Orthodox bishops, Philipos Mar Theophilos and Daniel Mar Philoxenos, represented the church.

In 1968, Indian delegates attended the East Asian Christian Conference in Bangkok. As David Daniel writes, this created an awareness of the Orthodox position in Asia. In June 1995, the Christian Conference of Asia took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Mar Osthatios told me that, if the Eastern Orthodox Churches invite the Indian Orthodox Church to cooperate, they could already work together on the social level, in India, in Asia, whilst waiting for the full unity to come. Let us remember that today there is a new reality of Orthodoxy in Asia with young Eastern Orthodox communities in Korea and Indonesia, as well as the older ones in Japan and China, including Hong Kong. That is why I dedicate this little book to all

Asian Orthodox people. In India, one can dream of cooperation at different levels, among students, monks and nuns and why not in mission outreach, since a small Greek Orthodox mission centre already exists in Calcutta. As Bishop Mar Osthatios proposed, there could be a meeting of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches in Asia to evaluate a possible future common witness. Indian Orthodox Christians have been isolated and remote from other Orthodox Christians for centuries, this will no longer be the case when there is full unity: India will no longer be "at the end of the world", but it will suddenly emerge from the heart of the Asian continent, between the Mediterranean Christian East and the Pacific.

Spiritual organizations, youth movements, social activities, all are progressing and the future of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India is bright, as a total renewal is going on while respecting the Tradition.

All visitors will be heartily welcomed if they visit Kerala !

SYRIAC MANUSCRIPT FROM THE KONAT LIBRARY

THE LORD'S PRAYER IN MALAYALAM AND MALAYALAM WRITING

സ്വർഗ്ഗസ്ഥനായ ഞങ്ങളുടെ പിതാവേ! തിരു
നാമം പരിശുദ്ധമാക്കപ്പെടണമെ. നിന്റെ രാജ്യം വര
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As telephone numbers and other information below may change, please check with the Catholicate Office.

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- His Grace Geevarghese Mar Dioscorous (Trivandrum Diocese), Medical College P.O., Trivandrum 695011. Phone: (0471) 442509.

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- His Grace Zakariah Mar Antonios (Cochin Diocese), Zion Seminary, Koratty East, Chalakudy 680308. Phone: (048825) 2023.

Spiritual Organisations

1) The Orthodox Syrian Sunday School Association of the East, Catholicate Office, Devalokam, Kottayam 686038. Phone: (0481) 572890.

2) The Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement of India, Orthodox Student Center, P.B 610, Kotayam 686001. Phone: (0481) 567338.

3) The Orthodox Christian Youth Movement of the East, Saint Paul's M.T.C., Mavelikara 690103. Phone: (04782) 2473.

4) The Martha Mariam Vanitha Samajam, Martha Mariam Mandiram, Kanjikuzhy, Kottayam 686004.

5) The Orthodox Christian Bala Samajam, Bethel Arama, Chengannur 689121.

6) The Orthodox Christian Balika Samajam, Kottayam.

7) The Servants of the Cross, Carmel Dayara, Kandanad 682305. Phone: (0484) 892159.

8) The Saint Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sangam, Orthodox Seminary, P.B.98, Kottayam 686001.

9) The Malankara Orthodox Baskiyamma Association, Kottayam.

10) The Saint Paul's and Saint Thomas' Suvishesha Sangam, Saint Paul's M.T.C., Mavelikara 690103. Phone: (04782) 2473.

11) The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church Mission Society. President: H.H. the Catholicos, Devalokam, Kottayam 686038.

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1) Bethany Ashram, Ranni Perunad P.O., Pathanamthitta 689711. Phone (R. Perunad) 23.

2) Mount Thabor Dayara, Pathanapuram 689695. Phone: (047536) 231.

3) Bethlehem Dayara, Chengamanad P.O., Kottarakara. Phone: (Vettikavala) 543.

4) Saint George Dayara, Othera P.O., Tiruvalla. Phone (04737) 4808.

5) Saint Paul's Ashram, Puthuppady P.O., Kozhikode 673573. Phone: (Puthuppaddy) 47.

6) Holy Trinity Ashram, Angady P.O., Ranni 689674. Phone: (047351)335.

7) Mar Kuriakose Dayara, Palamoodu, Pathanamthitta 689671. Phone: (04733) 2295.

8) Mount Carmel Ashram, Mathilakom, East Kallada, Quilon 691502. Phone: (0474) 85262.

9) Christa Sishya Ashram, Thadagom P.O., Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. Phone: (0422) 858228.

10) M.G.D. Ashram, Karunagiri, Karukachal 689540.

11) Mount Horeb Ashram, Muthupilakadu P.O., Sasthamkotta 690520. Phone: (047621)778.

12) Saint Thomas Ashram, Sooranad P.O., Quilon 690522.

13) Mount Calvary Ashram, Pattazhy P.O., Kottarakara.

14) Saint George Mount Ashram, Chayalode, Adoor.

15) Mar Basilius Dayara, Njaliakuzhy, Vakathanam. Phone: (0481) 462629.

Convents

1) Bethany Convent, Ranni Perunad P.O., Pathanamthitta 689711. Phone: (R. Perunad) 24.

2) Mount Thabor Convent, Pathanapuram 689695. Phone: (047536) 483.

3) Saint Mary Magdalene Convent, Adupputty, Kunnamkulam. Phone: (04889) 2960.

4) Bethlehem Saint Mary's Convent, Njaralloor P.O., Kizhakkambalam, Alwaye. Phone (048548) 283.

sister Krishna 691553 Pathanamthitta Dt

5) Nazareth Convent, Kadampanad South P.O., Adoor.

6) Saint Mary's Convent, Kozhimala P.O., Vallamkulam East, Tiruvalla.

7) Basalel Convent, Sooranad P.O., Quilon 690522.

8) Saint Paul's Convent, Puthuppady P.O., Kozhikode 673573.

9) Mount Carmel Convent, East Kallada P.O., Quilon 691502.

10) Saint Mary's Convent, Adoor.

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• Parumala Seminary, Parumala, Mannar 689626. Phone: (04783) 2202, 2226.

• Mar Kuriakose Dayara, Pothenpuram, Pampady. Phone: (048194) 431.

• Holy Trinity Centre for Disabled Children, Tabor Giri, Sreekariyam, P.O., Trivandrum 17. Phone: 418767, 442509.

For adresses of colleges, schools, industrial training centres, hospitals, orphanages, mission centres and others, please consult the MGOCSM diary or ask at the Catholicosate in Kottayam.

For any comment, please write to Christine Chaillot, 1253 Vandœuvres, Geneva, Switzerland.

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